

2013 Golden Jubilee edition

BIHAR YOGA®

CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCIENCE OF YOGA

Karma Yoga Book 1

KARMA

*From the teachings of
two great luminaries of the 20th century*

Sri Swami Sivananda Saraswati
Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

Karma Yoga Book 1

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*Including answers from the satsangs of
Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*



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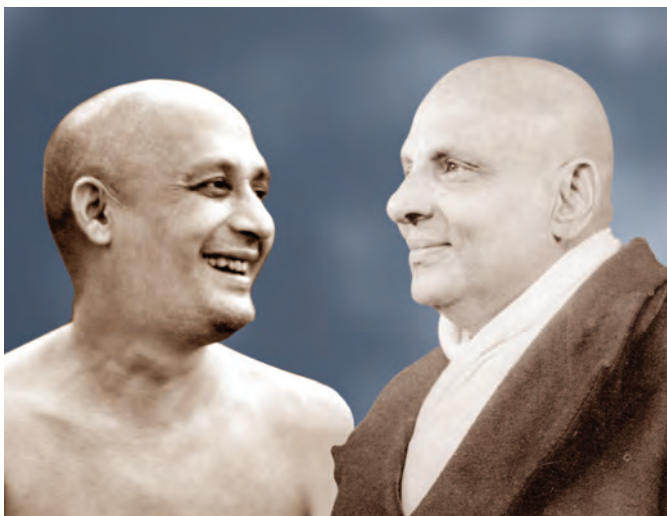
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga
and to our guru Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati
who continues to inspire and guide us
on our spiritual journey.*

Swami Niranjan

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Preface

CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCIENCE OF YOGA

Conversations on the Science of Yoga is an encyclopaedic series which brings together the collected teachings of two generations of masters – Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh and Swami Satyananda Saraswati of Munger. Satsangs given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati on his numerous national and international tours also provide the answers to many questions on this vast subject. These luminaries represent a living tradition in which the eternal knowledge and wisdom of yoga has been passed from guru to disciple in a dynamic continuum from the early twentieth century to the first decades of the twenty-first century.

The series consists of sets of books which present the vast, timeless culture of yoga topic by topic, in question and answer format. In this way, complex and profound subjects such as karma yoga, hatha yoga and bhakti yoga, are presented in clear, simple language. These conversations on yoga reflect an ancient and enduring approach to the transmission of wisdom, in which spiritual aspirants seek answers to their questions at the feet of the guru.

Many of the answers also include verses from the various relevant scriptures, connecting the modern experience with the classical tradition. It is through the lives and teachings of the masters that the scriptures are correctly and intuitively

interpreted for each generation, ensuring that the light of these revelations continues to illumine and inspire the hearts and minds of all who aspire for spiritual upliftment.

Conversations on the Science of Yoga has been compiled from the rich archive of satsangs and writings, both published and unpublished, which is held at the Bihar School of Yoga, Munger. The organization of this material into the major branches of yoga and related topics creates a unique interpretation of the classical yogic sciences for the benefit of humanity in the modern era. Deeply founded in tradition, the teachings are both systematic and practical, addressing the needs of individuals and society at a time when adjustment to constant change is placing unprecedented pressure on people all over the world.

The Bihar Yoga tradition

Bihar School of Yoga is ideally placed to produce this major contribution to yogic literature. Founded in 1963 by Swami Satyananda Saraswati, the system known in India as Bihar Yoga and internationally as Satyananda Yoga, seamlessly integrates all facets of the yogic tradition, including the various branches of yoga, the philosophies which are fundamental to the yogic culture and the dynamism of self-

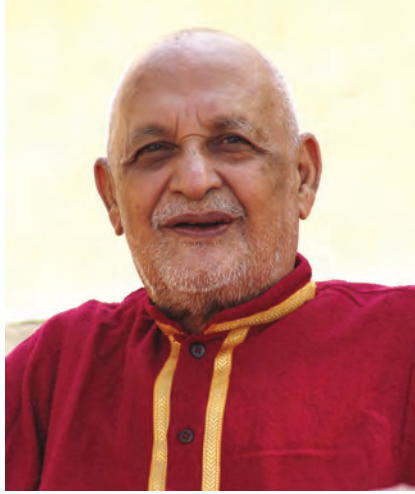


realized preceptors which ensures that the teachings remain fresh and relevant in any age. This all-inclusive approach means that yogic practices are available as tools for holistic life management, while other *vidyas*, spiritual sciences, such as Tantra, Vedanta and Samkhya provide a broad philosophical base. Emerging from this living tradition, *Conversations on the Science of Yoga* is a unique and precious offering to humanity.



Swami Sivananda Saraswati (1887–1963)

Swami Sivananda was a towering spiritual force in the yogic renaissance which developed in India in the first half of the twentieth century. After serving as a doctor in Malaya, he returned to India to pursue his spiritual aspirations, and in 1924 was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa in Rishikesh. He founded the Divine Life Society, toured India extensively, wrote hundreds of books and inspired thousands around the world to practise yoga and lead a divine life. Swami Sivananda's eightfold path of yoga – serve, love, give, purify, do good, be good, meditate, realize – expresses his philosophy of service to humanity and continues to guide the work of the Bihar School of Yoga.



Swami Satyananda Saraswati (1923–2009)

Swami Satyananda was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa by his guru Swami Sivananda, in 1947. After serving his guru's mission in Rishikesh for twelve years, he founded the International Yoga Fellowship in 1956 and the Bihar School of Yoga in 1963. From that base he took the teachings to the rest of the world, fulfilling the mandate of his guru to 'spread yoga from door to door and shore to shore.'

Through his genius and compassion, many ancient, complex and esoteric practices were systematized, simplified and made available to people of all ages, cultures and creeds. Swami Satyananda's blend of charisma and pragmatism attracted multitudes of devotees wherever he went, giving rise to a global movement and creating a far-reaching network of ashrams, yoga centres and teachers. Meanwhile, the headquarters in Bihar continued to expand its many programs, including the publishing division, producing numerous books that both preserve and disseminate the incredibly rich seam of practical wisdom which flows through this lineage.

In 1988 Swami Satyananda renounced his mission in order to live as a paramahansa sannyasin, performing higher

spiritual and vedic sadhanas in an isolated location. During this chapter of his life, he also realized his guru's teaching of 'serve, love, give', by establishing Sivananda Math, an organization dedicated to raising the living standards of the weaker and underprivileged sectors of society.

At midnight on 5 December 2009, Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati attained mahasamadhi.



Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati (1960)

A yogi from earliest childhood, Swami Niranjanananda joined the Bihar School of Yoga in 1964 and was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa in 1971. At the age of eleven he was sent to live abroad by his guru Swami Satyananda, giving him direct experience and understanding of people from a vast array of cultures and walks of life. These years instilled in him a rare, cross-cultural insight into human nature, enabling him to communicate and interact with the international community with familiarity, ease and humour.

Combined with his depth of spiritual and yogic knowledge, this background equipped Swami Niranjanananda to guide the Bihar School of Yoga and the international yoga movement from 1983 until 2008, when he began handing

over the administration to the next generation. During this time he also authored many classic books on yoga, tantra and the upanishads and founded Bihar Yoga Bharati, the world's first yoga university, while continuing extensive national and international touring.

Following retirement from his role at the Bihar School of Yoga, Swami Niranjanananda established Sannyasa Peeth for the development and training of sannyasins, and for his own pursuit of the higher sadhanas of sannyasa.

As the spiritual successor to Swami Satyananda, Swami Niranjanananda continues to inspire aspirants around the world.



Yoga is not a philosophy, it is a practical science. Philosophy gives you knowledge, yoga gives you experience. This is the beauty of yoga. That experience is a manifestation of your inner being.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Introduction

Karma is not only action. It includes every relationship one has with this world. Karma is the accumulated experience from one's association with life. Karma is what one lives and how one lives.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

The system of karma yoga has grown out of the concept of karma, hence, understanding the nature of karma is a foundation for the effective practice of karma yoga, the theme of this *Conversations* series. While the concept of karma and its various levels of meaning is embedded in the culture of the East, in recent decades the word has entered the global vocabulary, filling a vacuum in both thought and language. Since the mid-twentieth century, there has been an international explosion of interest in the philosophies and understandings associated with the idea of karma; but although the idea has definitely arrived in foreign lands, the word 'karma' tends to be used in an oversimplified way. People talk of 'good karma' when something positive happens or is done, and 'bad karma' when there is a negative experience or action. Another common interpretation is to blame difficulties on karma in a way that shifts responsibility from the present to the past. By contrast, the spiritual culture of India has an ancient and powerful connection

with the layers of meaning inherent in the word and the implications of these in daily life. It is the profound depth and importance expressed by this small word that *Karma Yoga Book 1: Karma* explores and explains.

Life's great questions

The idea of cause and effect, which is inherent in the concept of karma, ultimately takes one back and back and back to contemplation of the original cause; discussing the original cause inevitably leads to questions about the nature of the universe; and thinking about the nature of the universe seems to be a path to wondering about the purpose of the individual within that vastness. Many find themselves lost in such circles of possibility. When one is lost, one seeks a guide. But who is qualified for the task?

These complex, often overwhelming but repeatedly asked questions, can only be answered by spiritual luminaries, for they alone have the ability to both penetrate the nature of such things, and express their understanding in a clear and useful way. In *Karma*, the seeker is ably guided by Swami Sivananda, Swami Satyananda and Swami Niranjanananda as they systematically map out the intricacies of the journey, flawlessly connecting the individual with the universal in a continuum of knowledge from ancient to modern times, as reflected by quotes from classical scriptures, such as the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Ramayana* and the Holy Bible.

A map to follow

As the book progresses, one is taken from the big picture, involving overall definition, origins, and laws of the universe, to the finer points of a system which the Indian philosophical traditions have spelled out in remarkable detail. Karma is based on well-defined laws and classifications which have been discovered and validated by seers and sages throughout history. Swami Satyananda puts it succinctly: "The vedic seers created a technology of karma. They divided the karmas into categories in order to dispense with them in a systematic manner."

This thorough examination of the categories of karma gives a structure for understanding karma at a number of levels. Within this structure, the fivefold karmas look at the nature of action itself; for example, the *nitya* karmas are the actions of daily life, such as washing and eating, while the *kamya* karmas are actions done for selfish reasons and *Nishiddha* karmas are prohibited actions. Another grouping divides karma into three types according to its maturity. Swami Satyananda compares these to seeds at different stages: “All these units are put into three compartments for the time being: *sanchita*, the karmas in the storeroom, *kriyamana*, the karmas being sown in the field, and *prarabdha*, the karmas being harvested.” Other methods of classifying karma are discussed, with the perspectives and interpretations from the three generations of masters providing seekers with a map through the maze, showing how life is an intricate chain of cause and effect.

Samskaras

With these details of the overall concept in place, the journey takes a dive into the individual psyche via a close look at *samskaras*, the numberless impressions or archetypes that are embedded in the subconscious and unconscious layers of one’s being. Every impression acquired through the senses is stored in the form of an archetype. These samskaras determine how one perceives, acts and behaves, and what one strives for in life. According to Swami Niranjanananda, “Samskaras are the impressions which form the conditioning of one’s nature to react or respond in a certain way.” The teachings in *Karma* guide the aspirant towards consciousness of the samskaras, an essential part of karma yoga, which is the practice, method and means to becoming aware of these hidden building blocks of life. Through awareness, one then develops the ability to manage their impact on the experience of life. Dealing with the influence of the samskaras is a skill that can be learned; once it is mastered, one is no longer a slave of the karmas

and conditionings, and in this state of freedom, obstacles on the spiritual path dissolve.

Bhagavad Gita

The *Bhagavad Gita* is the story of a great warrior prince who is filled with doubt and delusion at the pivotal moment of his life. On the verge of launching a terrible but inevitable war, he gives way to despair and surrenders himself to the guidance of his divine charioteer, Sri Krishna. According to Swami Satyananda, “Only one topic is discussed in the *Bhagavad Gita* from the first chapter to the end of the eighteenth chapter: how to perform karma, how to express oneself totally, how to use karma for the evolution of the mind and the improvement of one’s situations in life, and how to make karma a tool of yoga.” The *Bhagavad Gita* is the most pointed scripture available on karma and karma yoga. The final chapter of *Karma* gives a glimpse into the contribution of the *Bhagavad Gita* on this topic, confirming the need for guidance from those with authority and refined wisdom. If even the great Prince Arjuna lost his way, how much more do the people of today, with limited exposure and learning about the nature and role of karma in life, need instruction and explanation from the seers of our time?

Karma provides the foundation for understanding the essence and substance of one’s interactions in and with life, the purpose of it all and the means to make life a more harmonious and creative expression of one’s highest potential. These understandings give the reader a firm foundation for further study and application of the knowledge to daily life, most directly through the practice of karma yoga. *Karma* launches the seeker on the transformative journey of karma yoga, shifting the starting point far from the limited, fatalistic idea of karma that is so widespread, into an expansive and beautiful concept of personal evolution. The responsibility for exploring that evolution belongs with each individual, as Swami Sivananda patiently explains: “Everyone learns lessons in this world and evolves.

God is only a witness. An individual has intellect and free will but out of his egoism does actions according to his own sweet will and reaps the fruits of evil actions. One can attain perfection and immortality through long struggle. When purity increases by practising virtuous actions, one becomes divine. God is not responsible.”



1

Karma: An Overview

DEFINITION AND MEANING

What is the purpose of life?

Swami Sivananda: Life is a voyage in the infinite ocean of time. It is a journey from impurity to purity, from hatred to cosmic love, from death to immortality, from imperfection to perfection, from slavery to freedom, from diversity to unity, from ignorance to eternal wisdom, from pain to eternal bliss and from weakness to infinite strength. Life is a great opportunity provided by the Lord for His children to evolve into Himself.

How can karma be defined?

Swami Sivananda: Karma is a Sanskrit term that comes from the root *kri*, meaning ‘to act’, and signifies action or deed. All actions of the body, mind and senses are karma. Charity, sacrifice, austerity, breathing, talking, walking, seeing, hearing, eating, feeling, willing, desiring and thinking are karma. However, attraction and repulsion, *raga* and *dvesha*, or like and dislike, constitute the real karma.

The concept of karma includes both cause and effect. Karma means not only an action, but also the result of an action. The consequence of an action is not really separate, but is a part of the action, and cannot be divided from it.

Karma is the sum total of one's acts, both in the present life and preceding births. Therefore, any deed or thought that causes an effect is called karma.

What is karma?

Swami Satyananda: Karmas are the actions done in daily life, which are both physical and mental. Any movement in the body, mind, emotions or psyche should be understood as karma. Karma is action, which is a product of the body and mind. Picking up a glass with the hands is karma, walking is karma. Writing, listening, eating and sleeping are all karmas. Karmas are not only physical actions. Mental actions such as desire, fantasy, passion and ambition are also karmas. Even birth and death are karmas. The entire life process is action. No person in the world can remain without action, even for a moment. Even breathing is an action. A person without action can only be dead.

In the Vedas it is said that human birth is the most important and difficult to attain of all living beings. After obtaining this birth, one undergoes various experiences in life with other people, with one's desires and passions, tragedies and comedies, and good and bad intentions. As a result of these experiences, certain reactions are set up in the mind, and this is karma. Wherever the ego is involved, karma is generated. When something in life disturbs one, this is karma. But when love or hate, happiness or sadness, success or failure do not disturb one, it means one has no karma in regard to those experiences.

Karma is not only action. Karma is what one lives and how one lives. It includes every relationship one has with this world. It is also the nature of one's attachments. Although the word karma means action, it also implies the overall existence. Even if one is not active, not working, one is still performing karma in the mind. Therefore, the word karma means one's attachment with existence. Karma is the accumulated experience from one's association with life.

How can karma be understood?

Swami Niranjanananda: Creation and life both form part of karma. Anything that is created is subject to karma, whether it is life, planets or the universe. Karma, in this wider context, means something which is manifested, created, and which has to go its natural course until that creation is finished. Until life is fulfilled, and one comes to the point of death, the entire process is karma. From the beginning until the end, whether it is life or the big bang and dissolution of the universe, whether it is the birth of an insect and its death or the birth and death of a human being, existence and creation are bound by the law of karma.

In this context, karma becomes the natural outcome of something which is existing. Smell and colour are inherent in a flower. Everything that is inherent in the flower and allows it to grow, beautify and express its nature is the karma of the flower. It is manifesting from the flower, in order to lead it to completeness.

Are karmas always being accumulated, stored and expressed?

Swami Satyananda: Every action, thought and place is an experience. A satsang or a lecture is an experience. Even an ordinary experience can become consequential in later life. There are so many types of karma. Charity is one kind of karma and plundering someone's property is another. Even if one doesn't do these things, one is still making karma.

According to eastern philosophy, even if one does not work, cook, clean or do anything at all, one is still doing karma. Even at night in deep sleep, one is working on the deeper planes. Primarily a person works in the unconscious; the conscious action is merely an expression of unconscious motivation. Modern psychology and yoga agree that during deep sleep, when there is no awareness of time and space, name and form, the mind is still working. The unconscious mind is the storehouse of all the past experiences or karmas, not only from this life but previous lives as well.

Also, the organs in the body can never remain inactive, as more than ten bodily systems are working all the time. As such, there is not a moment in life when a person remains without action. Only in samadhi can one completely do away with karma; otherwise karmas are constantly accumulating. Old karmas go away and new karmas come; every moment one is exhausting and accumulating karma. The ways in which one sees, hears, moves and thinks all exhaust karma and at the same time create karma.

What is the importance of thoughts in the creation of karma?

Swami Sivananda: Thoughts are the dormant seeds of action. True acts are mental, not physical. The actions of the mind are truly termed karmas, as it is thought that leads to action. Negative thoughts produce negative actions, good thoughts generate good actions. Thoughts are the source of actions, so thought is the real karma, thinking is the real action. If one can root out negative thoughts from the beginning, no negative action will be done. If these thoughts can be nipped in the bud, one will be free from the miseries and tribulations of this world. Therefore, one should watch the thoughts with vigilance and introspection.

What is the role of a person's motives in their karma?

Swami Satyananda: Karma is created more by thought than by action. The person whose motive produces the thought bears the karma. If I convince you to kill a man, the karma will rebound on me, not on you, although you are the actual killer. Here is another example. A judge in the court wants to take revenge on a man whose case has just come up for hearing. He passes the final judgement: capital punishment. The order is given and the man is put to death. The karma will not rebound on the executioner; it will rebound on the judge, as vengeance was the real motive for his judgment.

Again, suppose the judge bears no vengeance against the accused, but one party wants the fellow to be executed,

although he is innocent. The judge quietly observes the proceedings, but he knows nothing about the case. The arguments are put in such a way that the man appears to be guilty, although he is innocent, and the judge sentences him to capital punishment. In this case, the karmas will not rebound on the judge or on the executioner. They will rebound on the party which conspired against the man, knowing him to be innocent.

The karma produced through thought makes a much deeper impression on the mind than the actual karma or deed itself. One may be a farmer, merchant or warrior; one may perform any action physically. That, however, will not produce as many karmas as one's thoughts produce, even if one is locked in a room. The external actions are visible, but there are mental actions as well, which are not seen, and those invisible actions also create karma.

Therefore, a person can change his life by changing his mode of thinking. As one thinks, so one becomes. Whatever one is today is the result of what one thought yesterday, and what one will be tomorrow is the result of what one thinks today.

What determines the karma of each individual?

Swami Satyananda: Three influences affect or determine one's karma. First, the influence of previous births, the disc which one carries from previous births, determines one's karma. There is, however, a limit to the influence of the actions of previous lives on one's karma. The second influence is genetic transfer, the result of the meeting between the father and mother. The life-giving cells of the parents, in the form of sperm and ovum, also affect the karmas. Genetic transfer is responsible for the predisposition to certain diseases and affects the appearance of the body; for example, some have eyes like the father and some like the mother. A person inherits the karmas of his parents, whether they are good or bad. If they are good karmas, they make him progress in life; if they are bad, he is victimized. Therefore, every parent

must be careful, for a child has to fight to rid himself of the karmas the parents have created. The third influence is the environment and personal associations, which are external and can be seen.

A child receives karma from his previous life, from his parents and grandparents and from the environment. These are the three main sources. In the case of an adopted child, he brings the karma from his previous life, from his parents who transmitted the biological factors to him, and he adds to his experience the karma from his environment with his adopted parents. Even in a baby the subconscious and the unconscious mind exist, but the baby has not yet developed the power of thought and reasoning as an adult has. He does not receive karmas by thinking. Still he receives karmas through the senses and through the particular training that is given to him. The karmas go into his subconscious and his unconscious body.

Whether a person believes in reincarnation or not, there is still karma within him. There is the subtle form of karma, which is inherited from the parents. Science calls this the molecular inheritance – the DNA molecule. Karma does not only mean that action which one created in the previous life. Karma is the total acquisition from previous lives, from parents and forefathers, and from the present life and environment.

Is karma like the operating system of a computer?

Swami Niranjanananda: Initially, when one buys a computer, it comes loaded with the basic operating system – Windows or Apple. It is that basic software which allows other software to be loaded to make the computer useful. When one acquires this body, it comes with operating software. This life is an expression of karma, and karma comes with software to facilitate its expression in life.

For example, a hotelier will use software which is appropriate for hotel management. The hotel software gives the number of rooms, the number of beds, how many people

have come and gone, whether they have paid or not, what they have had at the restaurant, and so on. Hotel software is specific to hotels. Business software is specific to business, educational software is specific to education, diagnostic software is specific to diagnosis.

In the same manner, the basic operating system software with which one has come into this life is karma. The operating system software of karma contains four different backend softwares. The first backend software is the basic instincts: *ahara* or craving, *nidra* or sleep, *bhaya* or insecurities and fears, and *maithuna* or gross sensuality and sexuality. They are responsible for the creation of karmas in this life. Craving is an instinct which creates karma, sleep creates karma, sensuality, passion, fears and insecurities are responsible for the creation of karma.

The second backend software of karma is *swabhava*, the inherent nature, the character that the mind expresses in life. The inherent nature in a personality will always manifest. If one is aware of one's nature, if one transcends it, one will know one aspect of karma. Whether one is arrogant, humble, complicated, simple, enlightened, materialistic, sensitive, strong, one knows what one's nature is. This is a major karma one is living.

The third backend software is *samskaras*, impressions that one carries forward from the past. These impressions are received within the consciousness as a package and they become the building blocks of life. The fourth backend software is performance, application and association of the senses with other sense objects in search of happiness, pleasure, contentment and fulfilment. Senses also become a part of the human karma.

These are the backend softwares, and one comes into this life equipped with them. They are given by *prakriti*, by *shakti* or the force responsible for creation, manifestation and expression of the cosmic will.

These four components are also affected, guided and nurtured by the three *gunas* or qualities: *sattwa*, *rajas* and

tamas. Samskaras, sensory interactions, swabhava and instincts can be sattwic, rajasic and tamasic, or a mix of the three. The gunas emerge to support the operating system and are the secondary operating system.

How is karma performed and experienced at different levels of the human personality?

Swami Niranjanananda: Karma does not mean only physical or sensorial activity, it covers the entire personality. The thinkers of the past have defined five levels of action taking place simultaneously, consciously, subconsciously and unconsciously. These five dimensions of action represent the progression of life from the manifest to the subtle to the transcendental plane, and each level of action is a state of higher awareness. One does not live on the material plane only; one interacts with the subtle levels of life, and has the inbuilt capacity to realize the transcendental nature. These aspects need to be seen together to understand and appreciate the theory of karma.

The first level of human interaction is in the material dimension, where the body and senses become the tools to interact in the world. The second dimension of action is the mind, which is the subtle level of thoughts and impressions. The third dimension of human personality is the dimension of energy. This aspect should be understood, as one interacts in life more at the energy level than at the rational level. The energy experiences include subtle feelings and sensations which arise at a non-rational, non-intellectual level. There is a continuous interaction with the dimension of energy, but one is generally not conscious of this process.

The fourth dimension of interaction is the dimension of wisdom. This is a subtler level than those of the mind and energy. Wisdom is not to be seen as knowledge. Knowledge can be a conditioned factor and an intellectual process. Wisdom is where knowledge is applied appropriately in life and becomes a living experience. When knowledge becomes a living experience and one lives the knowledge every

moment, that state is known as wisdom. In this state, the faculty of discrimination is active and there is total harmony between the different aspects of human nature.

The fifth level of human action is the dimension of fulfilment, contentment, joy and happiness. Human creativity manifests at this level and a totally positive and creative expression of human nature takes place. One experiences inner freedom and perfection beyond the conditioning of the mind. One interacts in these five dimensions simultaneously. The process of interaction in life takes place through the concept or the aspect of karma. All the karmas, from the causal to the manifest level, are in a process of continuous growth and change.

There are many dimensions to karma. Some people look at it from the physical perspective of involvement to fulfil a desire or a need. Some look at it from the perspective of the mental direction and make-up. Others look at it from a psychic and spiritual perspective and say, "This is my nature." Some people simply impose their ideas on others and see everybody in the same colour, while others have the ability to discriminate between individuals and see who is happy and who is depressed. Karmas can be experienced in many different ways and forms, but for one's understanding, karma is the interaction with life in its totality.

How does karma relate to life and creation?

Swami Niranjanananda: This life is due to karma, not the life force. One is alive due to karma, in fact karma is the life force. The whole of life is governed by karma. Nature expresses karma through the elements. Heat is the karma of fire, expansiveness the karma of space, movement the karma of air, fluidity the karma of water and solidity the karma of earth. Desires, expectations and thoughts are the karmas of the mind. The actions of the senses are the karmas of the body. The body has its own karmas, the mind has its own karmas and the spirit has its own karmas. In fact, one's being is homogeneous karma, the whole

world is homogeneous karma and the whole of creation is homogeneous karma.

Life would not exist without karma. Karma and life are two sides of the same coin. One side represents life, the other side, those actions inherent in life. Action is a process inherent in creation; it is a sequential process of growth, of interacting with the environment and with the mind. Every kind of activity that happens in this dimension is known as karma. One can even say that karma is another name for *prakriti* or creation. The purpose of karma is transformation. The only thing that does not change in life is change itself. Another definition of karma is change in an existing pattern and in the generation of a new pattern.

Bondage is karma and freedom is karma. Karma is destiny, the direction in which all are moving. Karma is the blueprint of life, no one is directionless. The blueprint of life is karma and performance in life is karma, from the physical to the transcendental.

To what extent is personality determined by past karmas, and how much is it influenced by the environment?

Swami Satyananda: The word *swa* means ‘one’s own’ and *bhava* means ‘way of thinking or feeling’. *Swabhava* is one’s way of thinking, one’s personality, one’s nature, what one is, what one is born with. *Swabhava* comes from one’s past life. A person is born with karmas from previous lives. He also brings plenty of inherited stuff from parents and ancestors within the DNA molecules, and some powerful karmas from parents and forefathers through the unconscious body, which are forgotten. Up to the age of two, the situation in which a person is brought up has a great impact on his life. Sometimes that influence during these two years is in complete agreement with what was inherited, and at times it is absolutely against the inheritance.

That is how the personality is formed during the first two years of life; there is a struggle and conflict between *swabhava* and *samskara*. In many cases the *swabhava* that

is inherited from one's parentage comes into conflict with one's innate swabhava; there is conflict between the innate personality and the personality that has been imposed by one's parents and family. If the two are in agreement, a harmonious reaction is bound to take place, but if they are in disagreement, something else can happen. That is why in many families the father is absolutely sattwic and the son is uncontrollable, and in other families the father is a drunkard, a criminal and debauched, while the son is perfectly well behaved. This is how conflicts arise within the family and bring about a powerful reaction.

If someone had unfulfilled thoughts about another person, would that person have to take birth again to fulfil these thoughts?

Swami Niranjanananda: Everyone thinks, but that does not mean that the person one thinks about is forced to act according to those thoughts and wishes. One comes across many people during a lifetime whom one may want to live with or marry. If that is not possible for some reason, it does not mean that those persons will come back again as one's husband or wife. If this were so, one would have ten husbands or wives, as likes and dislikes change constantly. One thinks and creates situations in the mind. One creates karmas and eliminates karmas every moment.

In the law of karma there is a process of elimination, and the same is true with thoughts. One thinks and then eliminates the thought. It goes away and another thought comes, it goes away and another thought comes, then another. If all the thoughts were retained in the mind, one would go crazy. Nobody knows how to eliminate the karmas consciously and wilfully. Whether it is done through karma yoga, raja yoga, bhakti yoga or jnana yoga, nobody knows what the process is. Internally something is constantly eliminating, changing and destroying the karma that is accumulated in day-to-day life, and only those karmas which affect one's life deeply are retained.

Most of the karmas that are related to the empirical, objective world, the experience of time, space, object and senses, are easy to eliminate. But the karma which goes beyond the scope of the senses, mind, intellect, emotions, time, space and object is difficult to manage. This is known as *prarabdha*, the karma of destiny. One does not create *prarabdha* karma by thinking that one wants to study under this guru or that one. It will only remain a thought unless one is powerful enough to bring about a total change in the structure of the karma which relates one to the other person. For that purpose one would need to be either a complete lunatic or a self-realized person, as only these two types of people can do it. People inbetween cannot do it.

ORIGINS OF KARMA

What is cosmic karma?

Swami Niranjanananda: The entire creation, the universe and the galaxies are the result of a cosmic karma. It is a karma arising out of interaction between consciousness and energy, which is eternal and all pervasive. In consciousness there is generation of idea, thought and expectation. Everyone is an outcome of that cosmic interaction which took place in remote antiquity before creation. Creation was the product of consciousness and energy interacting with each other. Life is a product of consciousness and energy interacting with each other. Behaviour and human response is a product of consciousness and energy.

Creation is the outcome of a karma that is cosmic in nature and, as limited beings, humans cannot understand the logic or reasoning behind the cosmic karma. The fact is that everyone is here due to that cosmic karma. In the final analysis, man is not the master of his life. That is the conclusion given by the scriptures and saints. Thus, karma means expression; it does not just mean action. Everything that is being experienced and expressed in life is karma.

Is there an end to the process of karma?

Swami Satyananda: A person commits certain deeds. No one can stop him and he cannot stop himself. His nature will compel him to act. The action done with the involvement of ego is karma. This karma creates another; then that karma creates another, and in this way a chain of karma is created which never comes to an end. When a seed is sown, a plant grows which again produces seeds. If these seeds are sown, more plants grow, which produce further seeds ad infinitum. That is how the continuity of karma takes place through desires, and there is no end to it.

When did karma begin?

Swami Sivananda: This is an *ati-prashna* or transcendental question. This question comes to mind in various forms: How did maya arise in Brahman? When and why was the world created? Why is there evil in the world? Why did the Unmanifest manifest itself? And so on. No one can answer this question, but when knowledge dawns, the question vanishes. Therefore, there is no answer to the question at all.

What was the first karma that brought man into this world?

Swami Niranjanananda: One's entire life is governed from the beginning by karma, otherwise no one would be here. Animals have a karma, humans have a karma, trees have a karma, the elements have a karma, the entire creation has a karma. The biggest karma of this entire creation is transformation and change, change of an existing pattern, regeneration or emergence of a new pattern.

In a human being the seed of karma is desire. In animals the seed of karma is instinct. Animals generate karma due to their instinctive nature. Human beings generate karma due to desires, which become the cause for generation and expression of the karmas. From the point of view of yoga and the spiritual traditions, the cause of the original karma

is the desire: “I am one, let me be many – *Ekoham bahusyam.*” Human life and the karmas of human life are ruled and governed by desire.

The conditionings of society, culture, civilization and religion also influence desire. Desire has to be observed and analyzed in the process of yoga. Progress in spiritual development is indicated by a reduction of desires, which leads to a reduction of karma, and the experience of inner freedom.

What leads to the formation of karma?

Swami Sivananda: A person has a threefold nature: knowing, feeling and willing. These three fashion his karma. He knows objects like a chair, tree, table and so on; he feels joy and sorrow, and he wills to do this or not to do that. Behind the action there are desires and thoughts. The desire for an object arises in the mind, and the person thinks of ways and means of obtaining it, of exerting himself to possess it. Desire, thought and action go together in this process. They are the three threads, as it were, that are twisted into the cord of karma.

What is the origin of human karma?

Swami Satyananda: Nature or prakriti is the governor, the director of this great universal law of karma. In accordance with this law, man is born, suffers, undergoes pain and pleasure, and accomplishes his inevitable destiny. Human incarnation is a consequence of the evolution of nature. Prakriti has been able to accomplish this model of man through trial and error for over 8.4 million incarnations. Modern science also comes to the conclusion that the human body is a consequence of the evolution of millions and millions of species. During past incarnations in those 8.4 million bodies, nature has been fulfilling the great task of evolution entirely by herself.

She has supervised the evolution of consciousness through these incarnations. When she formed the human body,

however, there emerged a special item in life, which is known as the karma of the individual. After this, prakriti became somewhat free and independent, as subsequently it was man's own karma which would automatically decide his further evolution, pleasures, enjoyments, losses and gains. Prakriti only remained in the human body as a supervising force.

With the emergence of the human incarnation, certain urges remained with man from previous incarnations. These urges are eating, sleeping, fear and copulation. In addition to these, nature developed in man what is called *jnanam*, awareness of time and space and of his own existence in relation to the whole universe. Man was supposed to decide his own course of action on the basis of this awareness. He developed his own desires, ambitions and forms of pleasure and pain. Even with the destruction or demise of this human body, the consciousness of man continues to be affected by the desires he cherished during his lifetime. Propelled by his desires, man creates karma for himself and establishes the course of his future incarnations.

Karmas originate from a person's innate primitive desires. The desire to live is the primary origin of karma. If there is no desire, there will be no action; if there is no action, there is no enjoyment; if there is no enjoyment, there is no further desire or craving. One has a craving to eat chocolate; somehow one receives a piece, and it tastes nice. One has chocolate again, but it does not quench the craving, rather it intensifies the craving to have it once more. Therefore, desire is the cause for the generation and expression of karmas.

Why is it that humans generate karma but animals don't?

Swami Satyananda: When a being incarnates as a human, he brings with him a higher form of awareness called *jnanam*, with which no other being is endowed. 'I know I am and I know that I know I am', that is *jnanam*. If a person does something wrong, he will suffer as he knows he has done wrong. If he kills someone, he is going to suffer, maybe not

legally, but definitely mentally. If he steals or does something which he believes to be wrong, he will suffer mental agony due to his awareness. On the other hand, a dog has no guilt, so if it bites someone, it will not suffer or have any problem. Animals may bite or serve one, but nature will not reward or punish them. Their actions do not bring about reactions.

The generation of karma begins with the development of the mind and ego. If a small baby spits in someone's face or throws a knife at them, the parents are not going to punish him, as he is innocent. Animals come under the category of the innocent kingdom, as they live by instinct. Some animals are very intelligent. They have waxing and waning forms of consciousness, like monkeys, but there is no constant and consistent flow of consciousness. They may understand many things for a split second and suddenly there is a blackout. In some animals there is frequent blackout, and in others there is frequent enlightenment. Just as people think, some animals can think – for a split second.

In human beings the desires are both conscious and unconscious, but in animals there are no desires. Animals are controlled by natural urges. There is no karma if there is only a natural urge. In human beings there are also natural urges, but people are highly developed beings. They become aware of those natural urges and transform them into personal desires. In the animal kingdom, nature controls the entire movement of consciousness, so they are not responsible. There is no possibility of individual interference in the animal kingdom.

In animals there is neither good nor bad, liberation nor bondage, as it is nature which controls them. When a mother carries her baby from one room to another room, the baby has nothing to do with it. In the same way, animals are completely helpless, but it is not so for human beings. People are responsible for everything they do, as they are aware of everything they do. They have personal desires for everything they do. Therefore, karmas originate with the desires of which one has become conscious.

Do all desires generate karma?

Swami Satyananda: There is another important factor about karma and desire. As long as one has personal desires, one generates karma for oneself, but when the desires are not personal, karmas are not generated. A doctor in the hospital treats numerous patients. Some of them are seriously ill and he desires to help them. He gives medicine and performs surgical operations, but this does not create karma for him, as he does not identify with their suffering. However, if his son falls sick, he suffers greatly. Karma is generated only by desires that are personally motivated. When actions are performed selflessly, without any personal involvement, they will generate fruits, but not for the one who performs them. A desire in the mind is actually karma. The desire, however, may be personal or impersonal. Karma is not generated when work is done without the expectation of any fruit, or when one remains unaffected by pleasure or pain.

UNDERSTANDING KARMA

What are the effects of actions in relation to karma?

Swami Sivananda: Every act produces a double effect in the performer, one in the inner nature in the form of a tendency, good or bad, and the other in the form of fruit: reward or punishment. Past karma influences the present life in two ways: first, internally in the form of character or tendency, and second, externally as fate. If a person does an action, it creates a *samskara* or subtle impression in the subconscious mind or *chitta*. The *samskara* causes a tendency. The tendency develops into a habit by repetition of the action. The habit manifests as character. The character develops into a destiny. This is the order: *samskara*, tendency, habit, character and destiny.

How do karmas influence one's behaviour and life?

Swami Satyananda: Karma is the quality and law of nature. Human existence is a result of karma. The essence of human life is karma. These karmas force one to think, act and live.

A person's desires, actions and accomplishments are all controlled by karma. The personality is the result of karma. If one had no karma, how could one have a personality? Karma is not only action, it is the *samskaras* or impressions which influence the behaviour. One's whole life is a result of karma.

A person is a product of three kinds of *karmas*: his own karma, his parent's karma and the social karma. Therefore, he is a composite being. The combination of these three creates the actions, thoughts, progress, success or failure of a person. For example, a coriander seed has its own particular genetic potential. If this coriander seed is sown at the right time, in the right place and cared for properly, good coriander will be produced. However, if the coriander seed is good but the soil is poor and sufficient water is not given, the plant becomes weak, although the seed was good.

How do actions cause lasting impressions in the deeper parts of the mind?

Swami Niranjanananda: Everyone is looking for self-satisfaction. The main drive in life is the search for fulfilment, joy and happiness. This is a self-oriented search, but also a form of karma. When this karma interacts with the unmanifest areas of human nature, certain impressions are created in the deeper mind, which create another conditioning. An action which one performs today cannot be repeated tomorrow, but the result of that action can be felt even ten years in the future. The effect of that karma is a continuing force, like the smell of a rose. Depending on which way the wind is blowing, one can smell the rose from far away. Perfume is a quality of the rose. In the same way, karma leaves its impressions on the mind for a long time, so the lasting impressions are a quality of the karma. A common example is when a person fights with somebody; he may carry that animosity in his mind and heart for years. The fight may have happened five years ago, but the

impression still affects the mind and disrupts the harmony of the personality, and may be carried by the person until the end of his days.

Do all karmas have a strong influence?

Swami Satyananda: Many of the karmas that one does during the day have no significant meaning or influence. I may happen to meet someone on the way and pass on. This is a simple karma which has no influence on my life, but it is still registered in my mind. However, if I have a quarrel or bitter words with someone, this action will have a strong impression and the karma will be significant.

How do actions with personal motives or attachments affect the mind?

Swami Satyananda: Due to ignorance most people are attached to relationships, events and experiences. Therefore, on account of the interactions with people and events in life, one experiences joy and sorrow, happiness and unhappiness, satisfaction and frustration. All these day-to-day experiences in the family and society are an outcome of the interaction between oneself and the events of life. When one does some action with a personal motive, one is always aiming at the consequences or the results. It affects the mind and one is never sure what may be lost. If one has a business, one has an interest in it. Therefore, whatever happens in the business affects the mind and changes its structure. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:49):

... *kripanaah phalahetavah.*

... wretched are they whose motive is the fruit of action.

In the world one tries to fulfil desires. When the desires are not fulfilled, one feels unhappy, frustrated and disappointed. This affects the personality. Depression and nervous breakdown are the consequences of one's

relationship with the results of karma. Some people have strong minds and so they come out of the crisis, but many people are not so strong and they remain stuck in it. If something goes wrong in their life, depression follows. The whole thing follows as the consequence of the person's involvement with the results of karma.

How do karmas manifest in one's life?

Swami Niranjanananda: What one thinks and experiences on both the physical and subtle dimensions creates different kinds of karma. They also create different types of reactions in the personality, which are not perceived immediately. A childhood experience can manifest later in the form of a fear, a complex or an inhibition. The experience one has today will manifest later on in life in another form. The reactions always vary. These reactions may be negative and limiting or positive and open.

Karmas manifest at different times in life. Some karmas alter the lifestyle or beliefs for a short period, some for a few years and some for a lifetime. One is never the master of one's destiny. Nobody can say or guarantee which karma is manifesting when, or what is having an effect in which way. If a person starts thinking of one aspect, he becomes stuck. If one thinks of love, one becomes stuck in love. If one thinks of anger, one is stuck in anger. If one thinks of depression, one is stuck in depression.

This is what happens in life; one goes into depression and then into happiness. Attraction and aversion also manifest in this way. Some people indulge in food; eating is the apex of happiness in their lives. Everyone has this experience of an apex. Karma is what takes one to the apex; it changes, and simultaneously changes take place in the lifestyle. Through this process of undergoing karma, each individual becomes more mature and develops a bit more understanding and wisdom. One becomes stronger in the face of adverse situations, even though the situation may not be overcome.

Why do some experiences give happiness and others sorrow?

Swami Satyananda: Everyone enjoys two kinds of fruits from the past karma, according to whether it involved merit or demerit. Merit gives rise to joy and happiness, demerit to suffering. This may be expressed in the type of birth, span of life, or through various experiences. Happiness and suffering are not only dependent upon financial and social conditions; they depend upon the kind of acts which were done in the past. An act of merit gives rise to happiness, an act of demerit causes misery.

The effects of karma are mathematically obtained in conformity with the universal moral law. Thus, various fruits arise from past actions in the form of birth, the span of life and life's experiences, which may be enjoyable or distressing. Just as a photograph depends upon the type of paper, kind of exposure and so on, similarly, a person's experiences depend upon his past actions, good or bad. It is said in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* (2:14):

Te hlaadaparitaapaphalaah punyaapunyaahetutvaat.

Birth and class, the span of life and experience have happiness or sorrow as their fruits, depending upon merit or demerit.

How can one understand whether one's karmas are good or bad?

Swami Niranjanananda: First it should be understood that karmas are not 'good' or 'bad', as such. They are impressions which control and govern one's life from the time of birth to the time of death. The concept of good and bad karmas comes at a much later stage, when one develops *buddhi*, discrimination, and begins to analyze what is happening, what one really wants and what should be done.

Even in the process of analyzing karmas, one understands them through the *guna* which is most predominant. If one tries to understand the karma from a tamasic frame of mind,

the understanding and experience of the karma will be tamasic. Similarly, if one tries to understand the karma from a sattvic state of mind, the understanding and manifestation of the karma will be sattvic. This is an important factor in trying to understand karma.

Karmas are not negative or positive; they are simply the formations which are contained in the field of consciousness and which shape one's life and the direction it will take.

Is there any aspect of man that is not affected by karma?

Swami Satyananda: The body is by no means man; it is just a vehicle, a transporter. Within this body resides the *atman*, or the self. Besides the spirit there is another important factor, the driving force, which is called *buddhi* or intelligence. The *atman* is the actionless non-doer and non-enjoyer, the silent witness to all that is happening. *Buddhi* or intelligence is the driving force which plunges a person into fulfilling desires.

Imagine a four-wheeled chariot with a driver and five horses, and a passenger seated behind the driver. This image symbolizes the whole of one's existence. The chariot represents the body. The driver is *buddhi*, the driving force or doer. The chariot is pulled by five horses, which represent the five senses. The passenger, who represents the *atman*, will meet with a terrible fate if the five horses are not under the driver's control or if the driver is drunk or has gone crazy. If the horses are properly trained, however, and the driver remains in control of them, the passenger will meet with a different fate. In any case, the passenger is untouched by and unconcerned with what happens to the chariot, the horses or the driver.

The chariot will either reach the destination or it will meet with a fatal accident on account of the uncontrolled horses or the drunken driver. These are the two types of karma which one faces in life.

How can one become free from karma?

Swami Satyananda: Everything that one thinks is karma. Working in the factory and in the office is not karma. The

interactions with one's children, husband, wife and society are not karma. Every thought, every desire and every passion is karma. Drinking a bottle of whisky is not karma. The desire to drink the whisky is karma. Passion, anger and greed are karma. For thousands of years man has thought about how to become free from karma, but he has not yet become free. He finds it easy to renounce the external karma, but difficult to renounce the inner karma, the cause of karma.

There is only one way, and that is to realize one's own self. Then the karmas will cease to have an effect. Karma is not easy to get rid of and everyone is subject to this chain of endless karma. Each action has an equal and opposite reaction. This is the first law in science, Newton's first law. The more a pendulum is pushed to the right, the more it will swing to the left, again to the right, again to the left, action and reaction. No action in life goes unpaid, and one can't hide anything from oneself. Each person is his own witness and observer. He knows what he thinks, feels and does, and he knows what his real intentions are. By observing oneself, one can control one's karma.

Can yoga change one's destiny?

Swami Niranjanananda: It definitely can. First, one has to understand what one's destiny is and what destiny means. If one knows oneself, one's mind, personality, behaviour, actions and reactions, and can direct the actions and transform the negative tendencies into positive ones by having a clear mind, inner tranquillity and inner vitality, if one can go beyond the normal frame of mind, emotions and behaviour and develop a better perspective, one can definitely direct one's life and thus create a certain change in one's destiny.

There are two paths. One is the path of ignorance and the other is the path of knowledge. Usually human beings live in the area of ignorance. Ignorance means lack of total knowledge. One may be sharp intellectually and have a brilliant career, but not know one's mind, not know one's

personality, not really know anything about oneself. One can be a great scientist, mathematician or philosopher, but when it comes to the human personality there is lack of understanding. People do not know what they think, what they believe, what they experience or how to understand these experiences. They do not know what to rationalize and what not to rationalize. There are so many things which can and cannot be understood.

When one walks the path of knowledge, one's awareness blooms fully. Everything can be seen clearly and a different perspective develops. It is like sitting in a room which is in total darkness and looking around and then sitting in a room filled with bright light and looking around. In the lighted room every detail can be seen, but in the dark room little can be seen. So, through the growth of awareness, the development of consciousness and the awakening of the inner faculties, one can definitely reconstruct one's life and personality.

How does awareness reduce the power of karmas?

Swami Niranjanananda: Karma is a sequence of cause and effect. If one can become aware of the karmas now, if one can be positive, balanced and creative now, if one can bring awareness into the action now and become aware of the influence of the karmas now, the intensity of their grip on one's nature will be reduced. Karmas are powerful when one is not aware of them. A person who is aware of karma, however, has the ability to guide his actions and not be swayed or influenced by cause and effect. In that case, the force of the karmas is greatly reduced and can be exhausted in one lifetime. This is possible through meditative reflection.

A person who wants to be aware of something in relation to karma should observe the effect of an action in normal life and try to manage it. If one can handle the effects of karma in normal life, it will be easy to make one's life happier and more harmonious. One should make a *sankalpa*, a resolution, to live like a human being and not

like an animal that reacts to every situation. The awareness that one's efforts guide one's future destiny is necessary for improving the quality of life. Knowledge of the self through *swadhyaya*, self-study, contributes to the development of *sanyam*, restraint, in life. That affects the karma and the present and future quality of life.

Does living in the present help a person to manage the effects of karma?

Swami Satyananda: One should not attempt to know too much of the past or the future; both will lead nowhere. It is better to be unaware of the past and the future, and live in the present as children do. A wise man said, "Man wanders in the past and tries to look into the future, but he lives like a child in the present." The best way is to stare into the face of the present and try to live according to that. The present may not be happy: one may be ailing, one's wife may be incompatible, one's children incompetent, one's house too big or too small, one's business in debt, but whatever the situation, one should live up to it. The present should be experienced in all its fullness, as the solution to all problems lies there. In order to disentangle a twisted thread, one must hold firmly to one end. After all, there are bound to be two ends twined together in it. When one end is firmly caught hold of, the other end is sure to be within reach. Similarly, to solve the mystery of karma catch hold of the present and only the present!

Why is it important to understand karma and its effect in one's life?

Swami Niranjanananda: Through karma a person is able to understand life, improve the quality of life and transcend life. For this reason Sri Krishna has said that karma is one of the most closely guarded secrets. The human being, living in the realm of prakriti, performs all actions or karmas, yet does not know the meaning, relevance and purpose of the karma.

Sri Krishna's favourite subject was karma yoga. He believed that everybody is subject to the influences of karma. Since nobody is free from the effect of karma and karma changes the mentality, personality, viewpoints, thoughts and behaviour of every person, an effort should be made to understand karma from the right perspective.

If performed unconsciously and in association with ego and desires, karma becomes the cause of bondage and suffering. But the same karma leads to *mukti*, liberation, when it is free from ego and desire. Sri Krishna said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (4:41) that those who can understand the path of karma and karma yoga understand the secret of the yogas and the secret of life:

*Yogasannyastakarmaanam jnaanasanchhinnasamshayam;
Aatmavantam na karmaani nibadhnanti dhananjaya.*

Arjuna, actions do not bind him who has renounced actions according to the spirit of karma yoga, whose doubts are rent asunder by knowledge and who is self-possessed.



2

Laws of Karma

THE LAW OF CAUSE AND EFFECT

What is the law of karma?

Swami Sivananda: All the phenomena of nature are governed by the universal law of causation, which is the law of karma. The seed has its cause in the tree and becomes in turn the cause of a new tree. The father procreates a son, and the son in turn becomes a father. The cause is found in the effect and the effect is found in the cause. The effect is similar to the cause. This is the universal chain of cause and effect, which has no end. This law is inexorable and immutable. A person is bound by a gold chain or an iron chain; similarly, he is bound by his action, be it good or bad.

What is the law of cause and effect?

Swami Sivananda: The phenomena of nature are governed by the universal law of causation, which is an endless chain that maintains the inner harmony and logical order of the universe. A person's deeds are as much subject to this law as are the events and occurrences on this physical plane. The physical and mental forces in nature obey this grand law of cause and effect. The law and the law-giver are one; nature and her laws are one. The laws of gravitation and adhesion, attraction and repulsion, operate in strict accordance with this law of cause and effect. From the vibration of an electron

to the evolution of a mighty planet, from the falling of a mango to the powerful willing of a yogi, from the motion of a runner to the transmission of radio waves, from the telegraphic message to telepathic communication, every event is the effect of some invisible force that works in concord and harmony with the law of cause and effect.

The unfolding of life is made up of a succession of events, which are made up of their causes and effects. All the other laws of nature are subordinate to this fundamental law. The sun shines, the fire burns, the river flows, the wind blows, the tree blossoms and bears fruit, the mind thinks, feels and wills, the brain and various organs, like the heart, lungs, spleen and kidneys, work in harmony and in strict obedience to this law of cause and effect. This law operates everywhere, on the physical and mental planes. No phenomenon can escape the operation of this mighty law that includes the law of action and reaction, the law of compensation and the law of retribution.

How does the law of karma perpetuate?

Swami Satyananda: Everything that happens in life comes under the scheme of karma; it has a reason, a cause, and is not accidental. The doctrine of karma is an absolute truth, based on the law of cause and effect. If one does good karma, one is going to enjoy; if one is compassionate and merciful, one will receive compassion and mercy. On the other hand, if one persecutes others, one is going to be persecuted. Whatever is done in this life will follow one into the next life. Both the cause and the effect are there in the same substance. The cause becomes the effect and the effect becomes the cause, which becomes the effect again, just as the egg is the effect of the hen and becomes the cause of another little chick. Could there be an egg without a hen? Can there be an effect without a cause? Every action contains the cause and effect at the same time.

In the same way, the dispensation of karma is inherent in the karma itself. The presence of karma and the fact that one

exists proves that one has a past. I am not the beginning and I am not the end. I am a link in this long chain of events, which has no beginning and no end.

This endless chain of cause and effect controls not only human beings but the entire visible creation and also the invisible fields of energy. Those who have studied science know about the law of cause and effect. This law is the philosophical basis of karma, migration, transmigration, reincarnation and metamorphosis, wherein matter is not totally obliterated, but transformed. The doctrine of karma is logical; it is not an irrational law. There is a cause and so there is an effect. Whether one is happy or unhappy, rich or poor, healthy or sick, this is the effect. What is the primary cause?

There is a cause for all of one's sufferings and that cause also has a cause. This is how the chain of cause and effect continues from the past into the future. When one looks back into the past, the cause becomes the effect. When one looks into the future, the effect again becomes a cause. Cause and effect are inherent in one and the same action, in one and the same event. One cannot say that effect is ultimate or that cause is original. There is no original cause and no ultimate effect; there is continuity.

Does everything in existence have a cause?

Swami Sivananda: No event can occur without a definite cause behind it. The breaking out of war, the rise of a comet, the occurrence of an earthquake or a volcanic eruption, thunder, lightning, floods, diseases, fortune, misfortune – all have definite causes behind them. Scientists are carefully observing the phenomena of nature and trying to find out the exact causes of all that takes place. As the astronomer sits in his observatory with a powerful telescope, he watches the heavenly map and studies the stars and planets carefully. He tries to find out the exact causes that bring about the various phenomena. The reflective philosopher sits in a contemplative mood and tries to find out the cause of birth

and death and the pain and misery of *samsara*, the cycle of birth and death. This law of cause and effect is quite mysterious. That is the reason why Sri Krishna said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (4:17):

Gahanaa karmano gatih.

Hard to understand is the path of action.

How can cause and effect be understood?

Swami Niranjanananda: What is in a seed? It is not cause and effect but the inherent potency of the seed which will manifest as cause and effect. Cause and effect are integrated parts of the potency. When the switch is turned on, there is light. When the switch is turned off, there is darkness. Switch on, switch off. The fan comes on, the fan stops. Turning on and turning off is the cause and effect of the inherent potency, which is electrical. But something must come in between to make it work and function. That cause must have an environment for it to manifest.

If a seed is thrown on barren ground, it can lie there for ages and nothing will happen, but if it is planted and the right environment is created, the seed will sprout. The fruits will ripen, and inside the fruit another seed with the same potency as the original one will be found. The flowering and manifestation of cause and effect depends on the environment. If the environment is right, the potency will manifest. If the environment is not right, the potency will lie dormant.

In twenty-four hours of the day, there is fifty percent light and fifty percent darkness. This entire cycle from sunlight to darkness is the karmic cycle. This is the general theory, and of course every potent cause has a potent effect. Every impotent cause will have an impotent effect. Cause and effect are always balanced. There cannot be more cause and less effect, or less cause and more effect; both are equal. A potent cause will create an equally potent effect.

What is the purpose of the law of karma?

Swami Sivananda: Health, wealth, name, fame and prosperity are obtained on account of good karmas done in previous births. Sufferings are due to bad karmas done in previous births. If one develops a carbuncle or fractures a leg or arm, this is obviously due to some bad karma in one's previous birth. The bad karma was the cause and the carbuncle or fracture is the effect. If one experiences good fortune in this birth, the cause is some good action that one has done in the previous birth.

One takes birth to reap the fruits of one's karma. This body is the field and the person is the farmer. The seeds sown are virtue or vice, and the harvest reaped is according to the seed sown. If one sows a good thought or deed, one will reap a good harvest of peace and prosperity. The main idea of karma is not one of punishment for past failures, mistakes and crimes, but that one may learn one's lesson and gain the soul qualities needed as quickly as possible, so that one may fulfil one's destiny, one's special place and work in the grand plan.

What is the importance of understanding the law of karma?

Swami Satyananda: The vedic philosophy says that karma is the law of nature and every being is a product of karma. Karma is the theory of cause and effect. In the Uttara Mimamsa philosophy, the doctrine of karma has been analyzed in great detail. The word *mimamsa* means 'analysis'. When one analyzes the principle of karma, one understands that every karma definitely creates an effect. As a result one experiences suffering and joy, pain and pleasure and everything else. This means that the present, past and future lives are the outcomes of a chain of events.

The law of cause and effect should therefore be understood in relation to one's life in order to make certain amendments in the karma to avoid despair and sorrow. Suppose a child is born and shortly after it dies. Why did

this happen? Anybody would ask this question. If the child was meant to die, why was it born at all? This can only be understood through the law of cause and effect. This life is an effect, but what was the cause? By discovering this, one can understand the relationship between cause and effect. It is only after the awakening of ajna chakra, however, that the laws of cause and effect become known.

What is the significance of the law of karma?

Swami Sivananda: The law of karma is the basis of Indian culture and gives the proper explanation for the inequalities in the world: pleasure and pain, health and disease, wealth and poverty and so on. The doctrine of karma alone gives a satisfactory explanation for these dualities. It is sound, appeals to reason and gives clear light. Every person reaps the fruits of his own actions. A person has free will and can do and undo his destiny by his own thoughts and actions. He may be a bad person in this life, but he can change his thoughts, habits, tendencies and character, and become a good person or even a saint in the next birth. He can choose between two alternatives at every step. He himself is the maker of his bad luck and ill-fortune. If a person acts wrongly and immorally, he is doing something unnatural and against his own best interests. Each person is a free agent and the architect of his own life.

Only the doctrine of karma can explain the mysterious problem of good and bad in this world. Only the doctrine of karma can bring solace, contentment and strength to the afflicted and the desperate. It solves one's difficulties and problems in life, and gives encouragement to the hopeless and forlorn. A close study of this law gives encouragement to the person who has lost hope and to the desperate and sick. Destiny is created by the thoughts, habits and character of each individual. If a person changes his thoughts and habits, there is every chance of his correction and improvement.

The doctrine of karma develops faith and supports ethics. It pushes a person towards right thought, speech

and action, and brings a brilliant future for one who lives according to it. Those who understand this law correctly and discharge their daily duties carefully rise to subtle heights on the ladder of spirituality. They will be moral and virtuous, and have a happy, peaceful and contented life. They will be able to bear the burden of samsara with patience, endurance and strength of mind. They will not complain when they see inequalities in birth, fortune, intelligence and capacities. The scoundrel can become a saint, the prostitute a chaste lady and the beggar a king. This mighty law provides for all. How beautiful and soul-stirring is this magnanimous doctrine of karma!

What is the aim of the law of karma?

Swami Satyananda: One passes through the phases of evolution due to the law of karma. The doctrine of action and reaction is necessary for the progress and development of tamasic and rajasic people. Karma is the action of the cosmic nature. In order to evolve the consciousness to the supreme degree, the law of karma was created and operates in each and every being. The karmas performed through the body, mind and senses are related to a progression in the realm of nature. This evolution in the nature of karma is sometimes visible and sometimes invisible.

How do the different vedic philosophies explain the law of karma?

Swami Satyananda: Indian minds have thought about this particular concept in many ways. Sometimes they only thought of cause and effect; sometimes they thought about cause and effect in relation to *prakriti* or nature, and completely did away with God. In the Charvaka system the philosophers said, "There is no God, so there is no divinity in which one should believe." They did, however, have the theory of cause and effect although, as they did not accept the idea of reincarnation or rebirth, it was confined to this life only. They said that each being has one life only.

This particular position, which accepts cause and effect but denies God and rebirth, seemed illogical and did not convince the thinkers of India. So they went on thinking and over time various other philosophies arose. Of these, two philosophies stand out: the first is Samkhya and the second Mimamsa. The word *mimamsa* means ‘analysis’, and this analysis was again divided into two sections: *Poorva Mimamsa*, the earlier analysis, and *Uttara Mimamsa*, the later analysis. Both belong to the same philosophy.

The later analysis, Uttara Mimamsa, became the philosophy of Vedanta. The earlier analysis, Poorva Mimamsa, developed into the Hindu Dharma, where it is believed that divinity takes a multitude of forms, such as gods and goddesses, rivers and trees and many phenomena of nature. Poorva Mimamsa involves the worship of many gods and the acceptance of their realms of power. Just as a judge, police officer, secretary and engineer all have particular areas of power, the various divinities are also allocated certain zones of power and duties. For example, Brahma is responsible for creation, Vishnu for maintenance and Shiva for disintegration. Besides these three, they thought about various other gods and goddesses, *devatas* and *devis*, which can also be seen as the powers of prakriti or nature that guide man.

Poorva Mimamsa says that the karma one does is guided by two forces from within. These two forces are the divine and demonic propensities in a human being. These forces guide one to act, and accordingly give one a reward or punishment.

The philosophy of Poorva Mimamsa was not convincing, but in Samkhya the thought became clear: Samkhya does not believe in one God, but in two universal forces, purusha and prakriti, which are in constant interaction with one another. These two forces are inherent in every speck of creation, whether visible or invisible. Houses, trees, mountains, people, animals, sun, moon, stars and comets are all visible, but there are also invisible things that can’t be seen with the

eyes, such as atoms, electrons, radio waves, electromagnetic waves and so on. Samkhya says that purusha and prakriti are omnipresent in every aspect, whether visible or invisible.

These two forces represent opposite polarities. Although they are sometimes shown together, as Shiva and Parvati or Vishnu and Lakshmi, their natures and qualities are just opposites. When these two polarities remain separate, there is no creation; everything remains unmanifest as dormant potential. But when these two forces are joined, like positive and negative wires, the explosion takes place. When purusha and prakriti meet and join, creation takes place.

The interaction between purusha and prakriti creates a stir in the universe, and that stir, wave or ripple is called karma, action or motion. Creation is not only the production of the sun, moon and stars; it is an act. A thought and a movement are also creation. One is happy or unhappy, laughing or crying, sleeping or awake; these are all actions. One is attached to this person and repulsed by that person; these are actions. Creation not only means the birth of a planet or galaxy; one's day-to-day life is also a part of creation.

According to Samkhya, the prakriti aspect has certain illusory powers. Just as a magician deludes one, prakriti has a quality that puts everyone into a state of hypnosis, a state of primordial consciousness. Prakriti belongs to the primordial consciousness, and the whole universe acts in a particular way as a result. There is a law of cause and effect, and as a result of that law there is automatic dispensation. According to Samkhya, there is nobody in between; no judge, inspector, or God is responsible for dispensation. The act one has performed, the virtuous or sinful act that one has committed, is itself a cause which will become an effect.

The philosophy of Vedanta, or Uttara Mimamsa, is a little different. It says that there is no sin or virtue. One has an identity, society and culture, all of which are *moha*, illusion. One has certain values according to the particular structure of society, wherein some acts are considered good and some bad. One must suffer if one does an act which society says

is bad; this has been deeply imprinted in the mind since childhood. One suffers the consequences of that action as one believes it to be bad. One sets an effect into motion by believing in the cause, and that is how one suffers. Therefore, Vedanta has made it clear that one has certain beliefs due to the limited mind and, due to those beliefs, one suffers.

What is the difference between karma and the law of action and reaction?

Swami Niranjanananda: People define karma as the law of action and reaction. The law of action and reaction is the inherent nature of things. If both hands are brought together, there is bound to be a sound. Bringing the two hands together can be construed as action and the creation of sound as the reaction. Action and reaction is one's expression. Karma is not the law of action and reaction to which one is subject; karma is life.

The experiences of life are karma and the knowledge of the experiences of life is jnana. This is the difference between the two. As far as reaction and action are concerned, every potential cause has a potential effect inherent in it. Every cause has an effect hidden in it, just as a shadow is hidden in the body.

A shadow is a part of the body, it is formed from the body, but to see it one has to be in sunlight. Thus a cause has an inherent effect, and that is karma. Action and reaction are not karmas; they are karmic behaviours. Every cause has an effect hidden in it. This body is the cause, this mind is the cause, and the effect, the expectation, the desire, the craving, is hidden in the body and the mind.

LAWS OF THE UNIVERSE

How does the world run?

Swami Sivananda: This world runs on well-established laws; there is no chaos. Everything that happens is the result of eternal, immutable laws. There is no such thing as accident, chance or miracle in life.

The cause of a particular accident or event exists, even if it remains untraceable, hidden or unknown. Events occur in succession and order; there is perfect harmony. Knowledge of these universal laws of nature helps one to clearly understand that there is perfect order in everything in the universe. Even a rank materialist will realize the glory of the Lord, the law-giver, who is hidden in these names and forms.

What is the source of the law of karma and the laws of nature?

Swami Satyananda: Laws can't be accidental; they do not exist by chance. Laws are made by that intelligent being that people call God, Sri Rama, Allah, Brahman, Arhant, Buddha. Karma is also one of the names of God; it is synonymous with God. The *nyayikas*, or logicians, call Him *karta*, the doer, and the *mimamsakas* call Him karma. He is the Lord of all the worlds. If there were no law, there would be no law-giver. If there were no system, there would be no individual who could give a system. God means system, God means law, God means order, God means logic and God means mathematics. If there were no such mathematics, if karmas and samskaras did not exist, if there were no such law, one could do whatever one liked!

Do laws govern all aspects and functions of nature?

Swami Satyananda: Nature is a cosmic principle which is inherent in each and every object, so everything is controlled by definite laws of nature. These laws are known as the properties of matter or the properties of the particular object. There is a law unto everything. All flora and fauna, insects and worms, animals and human beings, planets and worlds are created according to its codes, and there cannot be even the slightest deviation or lapse in its operation. All phenomena: birth, death, karma, the sciences of alchemy, physics, chemistry and botany, show that these laws are accurate and unfailingly predictable. The sun and moon and their eclipses follow laws.

This point has been beautifully illustrated in the Puranas. There are also many discussions on karma in the *Mahabharata*, in the Bhishma Parva and elsewhere. This concept must be properly explained, as karma is the salt of creation. Not only human beings, the sun, moon, planets and stars also perform karma. They are constantly moving, dying and being born. There is activity, motion, growth and decay. They are all doing karma as they are following a law. The moon follows a law, so an astrologer or astronomer can predict an eclipse that will happen ten thousand years in the future. He can do this because he understands the law. That is exactly what Gargi said to Sri Rama in the *Ramayana* (Aranyakanda 29:8):

*Avashyam labhate kartaa phalam papasya karmanah;
Ghoram paryaagate kale drumah pushpamivaartavam.*

The perpetrator of a sinful deed inevitably reaps its terrible consequences when the time comes, just as a tree puts forth its blossom in the proper season.

Gargi called this *aksharasya prashasane*, the government of the imperishable. In everyday life and everywhere in the universe one always sees a law in operation.

There are natural laws which control and guide everything in the fabric of the whole universe. Every chemical action, physical action, mental or emotional action has a law. Just as there are laws in mathematics, similarly there are psychological and emotional laws. These laws are known by various names, such as the law of nature, doctrine of karma or dialectic law. For example, children need not be told that they should practise yoga. Psychological experiments and many observations have shown that children imbibe behaviour from their parents and elders. If the parents practise yoga regularly, the children will practise on their own. Children are always guided by laws of nature, so they will start practising yoga at the age when that law permits them.

Everything in the universe is run under a perfect law, the law of karma. When one hears the word karma, one always thinks it refers to action or work, but in this context, karma does not merely mean action. Everything has an inherent motive or action, whether visible or invisible, which means it is under a definite law, defined and destined by nature. Fire burns – that is its action; wind blows – that is its action. As man is a part of this universe, the advent of man, his life and home, his exit from the scene and his re-emergence – that totality is based upon certain laws.

Why is it important to understand the laws of nature?

Swami Sivananda: Every person should have a comprehensive understanding of nature's laws and their operations; then he can go along in this world smoothly and happily. He can use the helping forces to serve his ends in the best possible manner and neutralize the hostile or antagonistic currents to best effect. A fish swims with the current so that he will be able to go against the hostile currents by adjusting himself properly and safeguarding himself through suitable precautionary methods. Otherwise he becomes a slave and is helplessly tossed about hither and thither by various currents. Various hostile forces drag him in different directions. He drifts like a wooden plank in a river and is always miserable and unhappy, even if he is wealthy and possesses everything that the world can offer.

The captain of a steamer, who has a mariner's compass, who has knowledge of the sea, the routes and the oceanic currents can sail smoothly. Otherwise his steamer will drift here and there and be wrecked on some iceberg or rock. Likewise, a wise sailor in the ocean of life, who has a detailed knowledge of the laws of karma and nature, can sail smoothly and reach the goal of life positively. Understanding the laws of nature helps one to mould or shape one's character in any way one likes.

What is the law of action and reaction?

Swami Sivananda: If there is an action, there must be a reaction. The reaction will be of equal force and of a similar nature. The law of action and reaction operates in both the physical and mental planes. A tennis ball strikes the ground and rises up with equal force, obeying the law of action and reaction. If I speak sweet, loving words to anyone, that person will speak sweet words to me in return. Every thought, desire, imagination and sentiment causes a reaction. Virtue brings its reward and vice its punishment; this is the working of the law of reaction. If I radiate joy or relieve the suffering of others, I will no doubt receive joy. This is also the law of reaction. If I cause misery and pain to another, I will receive misery and pain in return. God neither punishes the wicked nor rewards the virtuous; it is one's own karmas that bring reward and punishment.

The law of action and reaction brings the fruits; no one is to be blamed. The law operates everywhere with unceasing precision and scientific accuracy. The person who understands this law of action and reaction will never do any wrong action, as he knows that it will react upon him and bring misery and pain. He will always do virtuous actions, as they will bring peace, joy, strength and felicity. The Hindu, Buddhist, tantric, yogic and other scriptures of India have written reams and reams of information on this subject, but in the New Testament of Christianity, it is beautifully summed up as follows (2 Corinthians 9:6):

He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

One should always sow seeds which will bring pleasant fruits and make one happy herein and hereafter. What one does comes back to one. What one does unto others, one does unto oneself. It is said in the New Testament (Luke 6:31):

Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you.

Therefore, be kind to all. Understand this law. Never violate it. Act according to this law and rest in peace. May that silent law-giver, who is hiding behind these names and forms, guide all one's thought, speech and action! Glory to the law and the law-giver!

Are all actions subject to the law of action and reaction?

Swami Satyananda: Newton defined the idea of karma for science: to every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. This applies to every action in life. When one performs an action, there will be a reaction. If one hits a tin plate, it produces a sound. If one loves or hates somebody, he or she will react. If one helps or hinders somebody, he or she will react. The relationship between action and reaction is equal and opposite. Only the action of an enlightened person, who has gone beyond matter, has no reaction. The actions of such a jnani do not cause reaction, but the actions of all others in this creation create a reaction.

What is the law of compensation?

Swami Sivananda: The law of compensation operates everywhere in nature's phenomena. For instance, the seed breaks open and a big tree develops from it. The tree grows in accordance with the law of compensation. Fuel burns and is destroyed, but in accordance with the law of compensation, there is heat and many items can be cooked in the fire on account of the heat. If there is extreme heat on the plains, there is extreme cold in the Himalayas. If there are ten scoundrels in a place, there are two sattvic souls to bring compensation. If there is a flood-tide in Puri, there is an ebb-tide in Walthair. If there is day in India, there is night in America. Peace follows war, and vice versa.

This law of compensation operates everywhere and is inexorable and relentless in its operation. No one can defy this immutable and irresistible law. The law of compensation operates on the mental plane also. If a person does a bad act, he will reap a bad fruit in compensation. One always

has to connect the effect with the cause. Whatever one may suffer from may appear to be unjust and not deserved at all. If one tries to find out the cause of this suffering, however, one will doubtless find that it is a perfectly right and just compensation. Try this in a few cases; there will be satisfaction and no room for complaint or lamentation. One will understand the beautiful working of the law of compensation.

What is the law of retribution?

Swami Sivananda: Every wrong action or crime brings its own punishment in accordance with the law of retribution. The law of causation, the law of action and reaction, the law of compensation and the law of retribution all operate together. One who robs another robs himself first, one who hurts another hurts himself first and one who cheats another cheats himself first. Every wrong action causes punishment internally in the nature or soul and externally in circumstances in the form of pain, misery, loss, failure, misfortune, disease and so on.

How is it possible that a creator full of love created a world where many animals live only by killing other animals?

Swami Sivananda: Nature is beyond moral laws. Moral conduct is only for man, meant to restrict his behaviour and lead him on to universal consciousness through gradual ascent along the evolutionary ladder. All things born must die. And there should be some immediate cause for destruction. This cause may be another animal, an earthquake, a thunderbolt, a flood, disease, storm or any other such event. Unless they are connected with human agency, moral or ethical values should not be attributed to them.

As a human being is endowed with a moral sense and invested with the consciousness of doership, he becomes responsible for his actions. Animals act spontaneously, without any consciousness of ethical conduct, and so are

free from the responsibility connected with doership or agency. No action can produce a retributive effect unless it is done with the consciousness of personal doership and responsibility. Man will be punished for his deeds by retributive justice, for man has the freedom to act and he is responsible for what he does. But animals have not been endowed with such a freedom and power of understanding and reason, so what they do is just the expression of their instinctive natural promptings. This is part of the scheme of universal nature.

What is the law of resistance, and how can this resistance be overcome?

Swami Sivananda: If one tries to change the old, morbid, evil habits and establish new, healthy and good habits, the old habits will try to return, resist, persist and recur. This is the law of resistance. The old habit asserts itself and says, “I will not leave my seat in your body.” An internal fight will go on between the old and new habits, the old and new *samskaras*. One will have to struggle hard and be vigilant, careful and circumspect, like a soldier on sentry duty. If one attempts to eradicate a bad habit and is careless, the old habit will recur. In the beginning it may recur more frequently and last for a long time. Later on it may recur less frequently and last for a short time. Gradually, one will gain strength and it will perish altogether, as the new good habits gain supremacy.

A new healthy habit will grow gradually, even if it is introduced only once. It will assert itself to gain a seat in the body and mind until it gains perfect success and defeats the old, morbid habit. This is another law of nature. There is always a double life in nature, the divine and the demonical. The fight between them is always going on in the body and mind. If one struggles hard, the new good habits will establish themselves quickly, and one will have rapid progress on the spiritual path. The pure, strong and irresistible will is bound to succeed ultimately. It can do anything; its powers are ineffable and wonderful. ‘As a man think, so he becomes’

is one of the great laws of nature. If one thinks one is pure, one will become pure. If one thinks one is noble, one will become noble. If one thinks one is Brahman, one will become Brahman.

How do individual human actions affect the wider world?

Swami Sivananda: A wrong action done against an individual disturbs the whole atmosphere. An evil thought pollutes the whole thought-world. Every action and thought, however trivial or insignificant, affects the whole world directly or indirectly. Supposing one writes a sensational article in a newspaper which arouses the emotions and sentiments of the readers. They begin to plot against the government, a serious riot ensues, police forces are brought in and many people are shot. Afterwards new laws are framed to check and repress the riots, and the families of those who were killed suffer. This riot produces an effect on the minds of people in other parts of the world also. In fact, the whole world is affected by that single event. A single sensational article has wrought such disastrous results. That noble soul who always does good actions in the world and entertains sublime thoughts is a blessing to all and purifies the whole world.

ACCEPTING THE LAW OF KARMA

What is the reason for the differences and inequalities in life?

Swami Sivananda: Only the law of karma can explain the inequalities of this world, such as why one person is rich while another is poor, why one is wicked while another a saint, why one is dull while another a versatile prodigy, why one is born sickly while another strong and healthy, and so on. Why does one person behave in a rude manner while another is civil and polite? Why is one joyful and cheerful while another is depressed and cheerless? How can one explain these inequalities? These things can be easily explained by the law of action and reaction.

God can never be unjust or partial. It is one's own karma that brings joy and misery, pleasure and pain, gain and loss, success and defeat. Nobody else is to be blamed. Everyone is governed by the law of action and reaction. The character of an individual is subject to the law of action and reaction, and is also the collective totality of all previous mental actions. Thoughts, habits and character change. One's present character is the outcome of one's past. One's future will be shaped by one's present acts. Each person creates his own character and destiny; he can do and undo his thoughts, habits, character and destiny. The law of action and reaction operates everywhere.

If the law of karma says that negative deeds will give negative results and positive acts will bear positive fruit, why does one often see people doing negative things without suffering the consequences, and people suffering who do positive acts?

Swami Sivananda: If one does an evil act, one will receive undesirable fruit as compensation. It is said in the *Shiva Purana*, "Karma once done is never lost in a crore of *kalpas*, aeons. One must enjoy or suffer the fruit of every deed." If one examines the life of an individual as an isolated event, which begins with the birth of the body and terminates with its death, it is difficult to find a correct explanation for the affairs of life. The present existence, however, is momentary, a mere fragment when compared to the life of the soul. In order to find the cause or antecedent of anything, one has to go deep into the affairs of the eternal life of the soul. Only then will there be a perfect understanding of cause and effect, antecedent and consequence. The law of compensation embraces the entire range of the soul life.

Life does not end with the disintegration of this physical body; there is reincarnation. One has had countless previous lives, so one will have to take into account the broad view of the soul. The line will be clear, and one will find perfect, satisfactory answers to all the intricate, complicated

affairs of life. There will be no room for grumbling or misapprehension. Every wrong action brings its own sure punishment in accordance with the law of causation, the law of action and reaction, and the law of retribution

Why do people who do good often suffer, while those who perform negative actions do not suffer?

Swami Satyananda: The manifestation of *vasanas*, deep-rooted desires, in different lives depends upon the possibility and conditions of the ripening karma.

In this life it happens that a person does not suffer although he does bad karmas, or a person may suffer even if he does good karmas. This is due to the possibility of manifestation of the potential desires according to the conditions available for the ripening of fruits.

The prarabdha karma of an individual comes to fruition according to the suitability of the karmas, not their sequence. Just as there are early and late varieties of vegetables, similarly some karmas fructify soon whereas others ripen after a long time. For example, if spinach is planted today, the vegetable will be ready to harvest in two or three months, while a guava tree will bear fruit after three years, and a mango tree may take five to ten years. It is the same with the karmas. Thus the experiences one may have in this life may be the effects of actions done in past lives.

Can the operation of the law of karma be understood?

Swami Sivananda: The law of karma is mysterious, subtle and unfathomable. Nobody knows the future. It is extremely difficult to say positively that this particular bad action is the cause of this particular terrible disease. If a man suffers from leprosy or consumption, it may be the result of one evil action or a mixture of several. One cannot say whether the fruit someone enjoys at a particular time is the result of only one action or a combination of several virtuous actions.

The fruit of one virtuous action may be enjoyed not only in one birth but in different births as well, whereas,

an extremely virtuous or vicious action will bring its fruit immediately in this birth. The fruits of karma are hidden. When one does an evil action, one does not feel anything at the time and thinks nothing of it. When one is in acute agony or in the midst of a dire calamity, however, one repeats: "O Lord, I have done a heinous crime in my last birth and I am reaping the fruit of it now." At that moment one actually sees the fruits of the bad karma which were invisible until then.

Is it possible to know which karma has caused one's present experience of unhappiness or happiness?

Swami Satyananda: The law of cause and effect is binding on each and every speck in the cosmos. There is nothing accidental and nothing random. The chain of karma is binding not only in the human body but also in human thinking and human suffering. Therefore, if a person worries about the result of a karma he is a fool, as he does not know which karma this present happiness or unhappiness is due to. The interlinking process between cause and effect is mysterious.

Suppose I receive some good news this morning, so I am happy. Is this happiness that I am experiencing a consequence of the result of the news I received in the morning, or is it due to something good which I might have done two thousand years ago? The good news in the morning may have been only an instrumental cause and not an effective cause. Maybe somebody committed some robbery and the police took him to jail for five years. Is he undergoing five years of punishment on account of his robbery, or is it due to some other karma? This punishment may be due to an instrumental cause, whereas the effective cause may be in the remote past.

Human beings have limited understanding and vision, so they try to create a convenient link between cause and effect. The karmic process, however, is mysterious. A good man can be seen suffering and a dishonest man thriving, a murderer having his heyday and a saint undergoing difficulties.

If God ordains and does all, why isn't God responsible?

Swami Sivananda: God is all and He alone does everything. Yet, when a man feels that he is the doer, he also experiences the rewards and punishments consequent to his actions.

Evil is only possible in the state of individuality or egoism, not when one is an instrument of God. The individual cannot kill someone and think that this is sanctioned by the will of God, as he is not omniscient and cannot know exactly what the will of God is, unless he is raised to the state of attunement with God. No individual should act under the misconception that he is meant to exhaust the karmas of the victim by killing him. This foolish act will react upon the person who commits the act, and the result will be intense suffering.

God does not tell anyone directly to kill or steal. If any person falls into the error of committing these actions, he alone is responsible and not God. There is no such thing as God directing an individual to perpetrate evil, violence or any act that is harmful to the wellbeing of others. All such misdeeds are the outcome of ignorance and delusion. One who does these acts will be punished by retributive justice. Divine activity is always a movement towards freedom, perfection, peace and bliss. It will not be the cause of even the slightest suffering or pain in any way.

If everything that happens is the will of God, why are people responsible for the fruits of their actions?

Swami Satyananda: When life was created, Parameshwara made a law, a system, a mandate, as well. One rule is that one will reap what one sows: if one sows wheat, one will get only wheat. But God has also made certain other rules pertaining to the sprouting and growth of the seed, such as how much water and what type of manure should be given. For example, rice needs more water than maize; peanuts will only grow underground. Everything happens according to God's wish, but God has laid down certain rules for different systems. Therefore, the natural law that is an integral part of each being becomes the will of God.

When God created human beings, He gave them the sense of *viveka*, or discrimination, to evaluate right and wrong, good and bad. But *viveka* is only there in seed form, so human beings have to cultivate and nurture it. When a man obeys the will of God, he flourishes and evolves, as while doing so he uses his intelligence, his *viveka*, to follow God's rules.

In this way everything created in this universe: earth, water, fire, air, ether, minerals, vegetation, insects, birds, animals and humans, all develop or become retarded, thrive or perish, according to the will of God, within the governance of God's laws. If the laws are followed, there is progress. If the laws are flouted, there is regression. In his *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Paramahansa Yogananda said, "All ills arise from some transgression of universal laws."

The laws of nature and instinct strictly limit all species, but God has made every human being free. He has given each person a mind as well as *viveka*, the power of discrimination. Even animals and birds know what is good or bad for them. But since God has given human beings the power to discriminate between right and wrong, no one can transfer the entire blame to Him. He cannot be accused of forcing anyone to steal and commit sinful deeds. Everybody has been given *viveka* and they have disregarded it, so they have to suffer the results of their misdeeds. One cannot say, "Look God, you made me do this, so now you should suffer the results." If a person takes poison or plunges a dagger into his heart, he is going to die due to his action, not because God is killing him. In the same way the actions are dispensed by the individual himself, either in this life or in another.

Why doesn't God intervene to alleviate suffering?

Swami Sivananda: Karma is likened to a wheel; it has to be worked out, as the force that sets it in motion has to be spent. The arrow discharged from the bow cannot be withdrawn, even if the hunter feels that he has aimed at a wrong target. Similarly, *prarabdha karma*, the fruit of those

actions performed in previous births that have come up for experience in this present birth, cannot be annulled. How does God help His devotee? The all-merciful God does help His devotee by strengthening his willpower and power of endurance to bear the *karmaphala*, the consequence of previous actions, with a cheerful countenance.

God is not responsible for the wealth of one man or the poverty of another. One suffers on account of one's own wicked actions. There is nothing chaotic or capricious in the world; events do not happen in this universe in a disorderly manner, by accident or by chance. They happen in regular succession and events follow each other in regular order. There is a definite connection between what is being done by one now and what will happen in the future.

How does the Bhagavad Gita explain the cause of action and the responsibility for results?

Sri Swami Satyananda: In the *Bhagavad Gita* (13:20) it is said:

*Kaaryakaranakartritve hetuh prakritiruchyate;
Purushah sukhaduhkhaanaam bhoktritve heturuchyate.*

In the production of cause and effect, nature is said to be the cause; in the experience of pleasure and pain, the soul is said to be the cause.

Sri Krishna says that the Lord of this universe has not ordained any relation between an act and its consequences; all this is the work of nature. The Lord does not accept responsibility for any man's sin or merit (5:15):

*Naadatte kasyachitpaapam na chaiva sukritam vibhuh;
Ajnaanenaavritam jnaanam tena muhyanti jantavah.*

The Lord accepts neither the demerit nor even the merit of any; knowledge is enveloped by ignorance, thereby beings are deluded.

In other words, the Lord says, "I have not inspired anyone to commit sin, nor have I given any stimulus or inspiration

for that, nor even for good actions”. The fundamental and inherent knowledge of every human being is clouded by ignorance. As a result, people are in a state of hypnosis, so they sometimes do good acts and sometimes bad.

Many saints have had the experience of ecstasy, even without performing any particular practice. How can this be explained?

Swami Niranjanananda: It has been explained in many ways. Every human being has his own level of evolution and is affected by the law of karma. The theory of karma plays an important role in the evolution of human consciousness. According to yogic thought, the karma that one experiences today is actually the fruit of karmas planted many years ago, and the seeds of karma that one plants today will be reaped in the future. A seed planted in the ground does not grow immediately into a flowering tree; in the same way, whatever one accumulates in the form of karma will show its results in the future.

Similarly, at a particular point in evolution, there is going to be physical death and the karma will carry on in the next life. Every time one takes birth it is not necessary to begin in the primary class. Those saints or yogis born with a spiritual inclination from childhood are reaping the results of their karmas from before. Their state of mind is receptive to the process of evolution, so naturally it becomes possible for them to experience ecstasy or have similar spiritual experiences without any spiritual effort, as they have already attained that level of knowledge, awareness and realization.

What is the best way for ordinary people to manage their karma?

Swami Satyananda: The law of karma is binding and everybody is bound by the karma related to nature and the individual. Where there is effect, there has to be cause. That is the law and that is the theory. The cause is called karma. Consciousness is like an ocean, which contains untold drops

of karma. Therefore, it is difficult to put an end to all this. It is best to let karma happen, and at the same time try to create more positive karma. When a person practises yoga and lives a spiritual life, another category of karma is produced which is positive, and positive overpowers negative. When a person practises yoga, makes the mind free and awakens the energy, the law of karma does not operate totally in the scheme of life.



3

Karma Classified

THREE TYPES OF KARMA

How is karma classified?

Swami Satyananda: The complete range of life can be seen by looking at one's karma. This is not just a few karmas. It includes all the thoughts, behaviour, breathing, movements, work and subconscious impressions in this life and hereafter. Millions of minute vibrations are taken into account to denote one act. How are they to be classified? One karma is said to be the smallest unit and there are billions of those units within the microcosmic body. All these units are put into three compartments for the time being: the karmas in the storeroom (sanchita), the karmas being sown in the field (kriyamana) and the karmas being harvested (prarabdha). Karmas are threefold: (i) those which have not started to mature and are in the seed state, (ii) those being performed today, which are shaping themselves and will soon become seeds, but are not seeds yet, and (iii) those in the seed state that have matured.

The third form is responsible for fate or destiny. They have been maturing in the form of consequences, such as happiness, suffering, love, hate, crime, murder, punishment, jail and so on. The second form is the current karma, the day-to-day activity in life, which one is not careful or sensitive about. The first kind of karma is in the seed state; it just

remains there. Of the three karmas, everyone is most aware of the third type, concerning fate and destiny. The first two types of karma, however, can be balanced by consciously following a diligent, honest and sincere spiritual life, thereby reducing the third type for the future.

These are the three forms of karma. They are technical divisions that are sometimes made in order to explain things. They are called areas number one, two and three, but actually they are one field. Karma is karma.

Are there different kinds of karma?

Swami Sivananda: There are three kinds of karma. *Prarabdha* is one's previous karma, which gave rise to the present birth. *Sanchita* is the totality of accumulated karmas that are yet to bear fruit, of which *prarabdha* forms a part. *Agami* or *kriyamana* are the current actions, which will bear fruit in the future. These three aspects of karma should be grasped clearly. *Sanchita* karma is the storehouse of all one's actions, good or bad, during the innumerable past lives that one has left behind. The entire store of karma is recorded and preserved from the time one began to discriminate right from wrong and thus started acting with responsibility and initiative. How could it be otherwise when one lives under the reign of an immutable law?

Prarabdha is the inevitable portion of karma which is assigned to be worked out in the present life in relation to the people and things one met and experienced in previous lives. This is also called ripened karma, as it is a debt which is overdue. The *prarabdha* karma must be paid in this life in the form of joy or sorrow, gain or loss, pleasure or pain, to the last farthing, whether one likes it or not. *Kriyamana* is karma in the process of being made. This karma preserves one's free will with certain limitations and ensures one's future success. As each person is made in God's image and shares divine life, one is free to act in any way one likes. By virtue of the same principle, whatever one intensely desires, one is sure to accomplish in the course of time.

Sanchita karmas are the accumulated seeds of action, prarabdha karmas are the ripened seeds of action, and kriyamana or agami karmas are the current actions. The seeds in the storeroom represent the sanchita karmas. The seeds in the shop for sale are the prarabdha karmas, and the daily sale proceeds are the kriyamana karmas. Similarly, the quiver in which arrows are stored represents the sanchita karmas; the arrow that is ready for discharging represents the kriyamana karmas, and the arrow that has already left the bow, which must hit its target and cannot be returned, represents the prarabdha karmas.

How can the three kinds of karma be understood?

Swami Satyananda: Swami Sivananda used to say that karmas are exactly like seeds. A farmer has a bag of seeds. He puts most of the seeds into storage as he does not require them for his next harvest, and he sows a few of the seeds in the ground. Then he waits for two or three months until the harvest comes. In the meantime, he goes to a new plot and prepares the ground for the next crop. As far as the harvest is concerned, it has to be reaped when it is ready, but he can sow any seeds into the newly cultivated plot and harvest it later. The rest of the seeds remain in the storehouse and he can do whatever he likes with them. This analogy gives an exact classification of karma.

Here is another analogy. The sanchita karma that one has done in the past is accumulated like fixed deposits. The kriyamana karma that one is generating at the moment is the current bank account. When the fixed deposit matures and pays the interest of ten percent, that is prarabdha karma; it is not the principal amount. The principal remains, and one reaps only the destiny. That principal will be invested again and create another destiny, like a fixed deposit. One will receive another ten percent at the end of two years, put it in one's pocket and reinvest the principal again. This concept of sanchita, kriyamana and prarabdha karma is a special contribution of the yoga shastras and vedic philosophy. Other traditions have a different concept of karma altogether.

What is sanchita karma?

Swami Satyananda: Whatever a person has done in his previous life is embedded in his subconscious mind and is called sanchita karma, or accumulated action; it is the subconscious stuff. Sanchita karmas are the accumulated experiences and involvements in life, which have been registered by the consciousness, but are not influencing one's life at the moment. These accumulated actions are maturing every minute, every day, every month, and one reaps the interest in the form of happiness and unhappiness, birth and death, love and hate and so on.

What is kriyamana karma?

Swami Satyananda: New action which one is doing in a new atmosphere, under new training, is also karma. Kriyamana are the current karmas or acts which one does every day. The consequences of these acts are registered in the consciousness. Current actions are performed due to desire and passion. The current karmas can be controlled, if one has sufficient willpower. The quality of the present karma can be controlled with the help of higher powers. One can change and transform the course of the present karma. When actions are performed without discrimination, one certainly makes mistakes. Bad karmas and mistakes are the same thing. The course of these actions can be changed by acting with awareness and judgement.

What is prarabdha karma?

Swami Satyananda: The karmas which have started begetting results are known as prarabdha, fate or destiny. Prarabdha karmas mature in the form of consequences which one must undergo in this life, such as happiness, suffering, reward, punishment, health and disease. Of the three types of karma, prarabdha has the greatest influence on one's life. Prarabdha is also known as *adami* or fate, that which will happen. Prarabdha karmas are those which are about to take place. Certain experiences, involvements and relationships from the past begin to affect and interfere with one's present actions,

state of health, thinking process, family circumstances and every aspect of life.

Prarabdha are the ripened fruit of one's individual karmas which are being released in this lifetime, so they are no longer a part of the sum total of karmas. Often good and bad karmas fructify at the same time; one enjoys and suffers, side by side. One may have a lot of money, but suffer from high blood pressure or paralysis. One may have many good friends and many enemies at the same time. Each karma is rewarded or punished separately.

In what ways are prarabdha karmas expressed by different types of people?

Swami Sivananda: There are three kinds of prarabdha: *iccha prarabdha*, with desire, *aniccha prarabdha*, without desire, and *paraiccha prarabdha*, a desire of someone else, a desire other than one's own.

Ichha prarabdha creates desire. One knows the negative consequences of certain actions, yet is impelled to do them. One knows that sweets are harmful when one has diarrhoea, yet one eats them. One commits theft or has illicit intercourse with the wife of another person. These are all instances of iccha prarabdha.

One is forced to do forbidden actions by the force of prarabdha, although one has the strong conviction that they will bring calamity. There is a difference between the iccha prarabdha of *vivekins*, those with discrimination, and non-vivekins, who are without discrimination. Non-vivekins are egoistic and think they are the agents of their actions. They do mischief and evil actions to others, and so they are always full of misery. Vivekins eradicate attachment, desires and egoism. They have no desire for money. They desire to lead a peaceful life and serve others.

Aniccha prarabdha is common to vivekins and non-vivekins. Both suffer from the heat of the sun, wind, rain, lightening, disease and accidental injury, such as striking the head against the door.

Paraiccha prarabdha is also common to both. A person prostrates before a vivekin or a non-vivekin and implores him to render some help or service. One must undergo the pleasure or pain that accrues from this action.

What is the origin of prarabdha in one's life and in the cosmos?

Swami Satyananda: It is difficult to know which life prarabdha proceeds from and few people know this. The father of prarabdha is karma, and the father of karma is prarabdha. The egg came from the chicken, and the chicken came from the egg. When one understands this, one will find the balance between the two, which is essential. Without action there is no cause, and without cause there is no action. Is the egg the cause of the chicken or the chicken the cause of the egg? Is action the cause of prarabdha or prarabdha the cause of action? It is said in *Yoga Vasishtha* (2:10:1):

*Yathaasthitam brahmatattvam satta niyatiruchyate;
Saa vineturvinetritvam saa vineyavineyataa.*

This thing called destiny is as true as the reality of God. It is the cause of causes and effect of effects. It is an attribute of God.

The sages say that action is the cause, not prarabdha. Why is action the cause? The Upanishads say that in the beginning He was one and He wanted to become many, so He created the whole universe. Therefore, the first action was performed by God; the creation of the universe was the first act. The universe manifested from the formless, attributeless Brahman. Why did the formless assume form? The formless assumed form because this was the action performed by God. Action has come into being from God, and prarabdha has begun from action.

There has to be prarabdha. If a fruit comes from the mango tree, the seed will follow. When the seed emerges, again the tree will be born, and further fruits and seeds will

be produced. The pattern will continue. In the same way, karma arose from God. The father of *adi karma*, the first action, is not *prarabdha*, but *Parampurusha*, the supreme consciousness. Karma was born from Parampurusha. What was that karma? It was the creation of Vishnu, the preserver of creation, and Shiva, the destroyer of creation. From these two karmas, *prarabdha* was born, gods and goddesses were born, nature was born and maya was born.

How can the sanchita, kriyamana and prarabdha karmas be managed?

Swami Satyananda: Karma is the chain of actions created by man in his life. In other words, it is the effects of all the activities in life. These karmas are threefold: those that are being performed now, those that have already been performed and those that are manifesting in the form of destiny. The karma that one is performing at the moment can always be changed by willpower. The karma that one has already performed can be harmonized by leading a spiritual life. But the karma which has taken the form of destiny cannot be revoked; it must be undergone. One gets the fruit of such actions either in this lifetime or in another.

Here is a simple example. A person carries a loaded revolver in his pocket; that's one stage. He takes out the loaded revolver and holds it in his hand ready to shoot. At that time he can still decide to put the revolver back in his pocket; that's another stage. He presses the trigger of the loaded revolver and the shot is fired; the action is done. Destiny is like the bullet that has been fired; it cannot be revoked. Destiny cannot be altered; it must be faced.

Some karmas can be eradicated by *purushartha*, human effort, but there are others which cannot. Sanchita, the accumulated karmas, are difficult to control and cannot be nullified, but there are ways to balance them, such as penance, simple living, abstinence from sensual enjoyments from time to time, meditation and a lot of mantra. When a person realizes that he has done many bad acts in the past

and his karmas are crude, he must take steps to nullify them. He will have to lead a spiritual life and practise many forms of yoga and tantra to destroy those karmas. If he does not do this, those karmas will fructify in the course of time. The karmas which have already been performed, but have not yet matured, can be harmonized by leading a spiritual life.

Kriyamana, the current karma, can be controlled by a person who has sufficient willpower. If one has the help of higher powers, the quality of the present karma can be controlled. In order to deal with the present or current karma, one must attend satsang and live with saintly personalities. One must search for positive environments, so that the habits, thoughts, personality and character are reformed. The present karma is positively influenced by practising yoga and living in the ashram. If one does not influence the present karmas, the bad karmas will accumulate and then they will fructify.

The prarabdha karmas are impossible to alter; destiny is unalterable. Those karmas are like an arrow which has already been released. They will have to reach their destination, no matter how much one tries to prevent them. Even the greatest of men have had to undergo their prarabdha. They could not change it. Destiny has to be faced by everyone, even a great saint, prophet or incarnation of God.

How are accumulated and current karmas eliminated?

Swami Sivananda: The sanchita karmas are destroyed by *brahmajnana*, knowledge of the absolute. The agami or current karmas of a *jnani*, a person of knowledge, are also annihilated by *brahmajnana*, as he is untouched or unaffected by his karmas, like the lotus leaf which is unaffected by drops of water. Thus the *jnani* gets untangled from the fetters of all karmas. The accumulated and current actions of a *jnani* take shelter in *brahmananda prakriti*, the nature of blissful, absolute consciousness. Those who serve and adore a *jnani* acquire his merit of current actions, while

those who hate and censure him receive the demerit of his current actions.

What happens to the accumulated sanchita karma of many births after enlightenment?

Swami Sivananda: The subtle seed-like impressions of all the accumulated actions lie dormant in *chidakasha*, the mental space. When a great jnani is illuminated through direct intuitive knowledge, he transcends the five sheaths and also their witnessing intelligence, the *sakshi*. The subtle impressions of the sanchita karma, which are lying in the manomaya kosha in chidakasha, remain in the sheath only and no longer bind the liberated jnani.

How is prarabdha karma exhausted?

Swami Sivananda: Prarabdha karma is exhausted by no other means than experiencing its fruit. A potter sets his wheel in motion with a rod, and then he removes his hand and the rod, allowing the wheel to revolve until the momentum is exhausted. In the same way, the jnani continues to experience the fruit of his prarabdha karma until the end of his life, even after the attainment of *jivanmukti*, liberation of the soul, through self-knowledge. Although the jnani continues to enjoy the fruit of his prarabdha karma, they no longer produce the seeds of sanchita karma due to his non-attachment or absence of craving for them. He has realized their impermanent and unreal nature through self-knowledge, so their enjoyment does not affect him in any way. Due to non-attachment, the experiences of happiness and misery are incapable of producing the seeds of sanchita karma, just as parched grains are unable to germinate and produce any crop.

How should the three types of karma be faced?

Swami Niranjanananda: Karma manifests in life, becoming visible and conscious when one becomes aware that 'I exist, I am.' There are two states: one is static karma and the other is fluid karma. Static karma is the prarabdha, which defines

the parameters in which one has to live this life. A black elephant, no matter how much it is scrubbed with soap, will never become white. What is destined or prarabdha has to be lived and cannot be changed. If at the age of fifty or sixty, a person develops cancer, that is the karma he has to live with. It does not matter whether one is a yogi or not, as that is the static or destined karma.

However, the fluid or kriyamana karma are created, lived, experienced, accumulated, purified, absorbed or rejected. They can be manipulated. The fluid karmas are defined in the literature and scriptures. Nobody talks about the static or prarabdha karma as there is nothing to talk about. Everybody is living it. While explaining karma, Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita* (5:11):

*Kaayena manasaa buddhyaa kevalairindriyairapi;
Yoginah karma kurvanti sangam tyaktvaatmashuddhaye.*

Yogis, having abandoned attachment, perform actions only by the body, mind, intellect and also by the senses, for purification of the self.

Yogis or enlightened beings perform action with the purpose of attaining inner purification or freedom from obsession and attachment. This is one statement. The other statement is that *bhogis*, non-enlightened people with a gross mentality and materialistic tendencies, are involved in karma for personal satisfaction and not for inner purification.

Bhogis are not immune to the influence of the karmas, whereas yogis, through karma yoga, try to attain immunity from the effect of the karmas. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:48):

*Yogasthah kuru karmaani sangam tyaktvaa dhananjaya;
Siddhyasiddhyoh samo bhootvaa samatvam yoga uchyate.*

Perform action, O Arjuna, being steadfast in yoga, abandoning attachment and balanced in success and failure! Evenness of mind is called yoga.

Whether one is successful or unsuccessful does not matter. By maintaining mental equilibrium and equipoise, one can alter the effect of karma and be free from its results.

According to Sri Krishna, therefore, the purpose of karma should not be self-gratification, as that will lead to deeper attachment and involvement with the senses and the material world. It will create more cravings and desires, and cloud wisdom. The performance, reaction and action that results will create further experiences of suffering, dejection, frustration, happiness or contentment, which are fleeting in nature. The focus of whatever is done through the senses, mind, emotions and at all levels of the personality has to be the cultivation of awareness, which will develop immunity from the influence of karmas, whether they are positive or negative.

In yoga there is no practice to change the prarabdha or destined karma. However, through meditation it is possible to access the sanchita or accumulated karmas, recognize their influence, effect and impressions and release them. There has to be a gradual progression through pratyahara, dharana and dhyana in order to access the dimension where samskaras are hidden. It is not possible to discover the samskaras just by meditating, without going through that gradual progression.

In karma yoga, one manages the fluid karmas of the senses, mind, emotions, one's nature, personality and life. The fluid or kriyamana karmas are managed by becoming aware and giving a clear aim and direction for their fulfilment, knowing the outcome to be beneficial and appropriate, detaching oneself from the karma. The most important thing is to develop immunity from the influence of the kriyamana or fluid karma, as they are the cause of happiness and pain, identification and dis-identification, me and mine, the feeling of suffering when there is loss and the feeling of elation when there is gain. One does not have to develop immunity from sanchita karma or from prarabdha karma. Whether one loses a house, a job or a family member, the suffering is kriyamana. It can be changed by bringing about a balance in the mental perception and understanding of the karma, and by changing

the thoughts. The mental attitude has to be monitored while dealing with kriyamana karma.

Karma yoga is for managing the kriyamana or fluid karma. Dhyana yoga, the yoga of meditation, is for managing the sanchita karma. Living life in the best possible manner, joyfully, peacefully and creatively, is the way to manage the destined or prarabdha karma.

How can the three types of karma be summarized?

Swami Niranjanananda: Evolution is always from seed to tree and back to seed. If a tree drops no seed, its evolution stops. There is no regeneration and no further growth.

The average lifespan is eighty years. That becomes the karma of the body and senses, the time for the body to take birth and be destroyed. Everything is happening in the dimension of time. Time measures, and what is measured in time, from seed to growth and back to seed, is the entire karma. From birth until death everyone is subject to karma. For twenty-four hours every day, the universe is subject to karma. This karma has been defined in three groups.

Prarabdha karma means the inherent response. What is the prarabdha karma of light? Wherever there is light, there will be the absence of darkness. That is the destined karma of light. What is the destined karma of the body, which nobody can stop? It is decay and death. That which is destined, and where there is no human intervention, is called prarabdha karma.

Destiny is seen in a broad context, not in a specific context. The destiny of everyone who takes birth is to die one day. The destiny of any clear surface, like a mirror or a peaceful body of water, is reflection. It will reflect anything, whether it is a face, a leaf, a mountain, stars, the sun or moon. But if the water is disturbed, the reflection cannot be seen. The water has to be absolutely still and calm for a reflection to be seen. If the mirror is cleaned and the dust removed, it will show everything, but even a slight film of dust will obscure what can be seen.

Everyone is a part of destiny. It cannot be changed or controlled, just as ageing cannot be changed or controlled, death cannot be changed or controlled and birth cannot be changed or controlled. That is known as prarabdha. The outcome of every form, object or idea becomes prarabdha karma.

Kriyamana karma is what one is creating. An individual is creating, according to free will within the confines of the destined parameters. Take this example: a builder constructs a house. Someone looks at the house, likes it and buys it. The builder has erected the walls and rooms. After buying the house, the owner lives within the defined structure and dimensions of the house. He is free to arrange objects as he wishes within that structure. The builder has no further role to play. The owner beautifies the home, choosing where to place the furniture and pictures, but within the confines of the structure of the home. That is *kriyamana karma*; it is active at present. The individual is creating and developing it.

Sanchita karma is the accumulated karma. After buying the house, the owner decorates it and places everything inside. For the first year everything is pleasant, neat and clean. Then more and more objects are acquired. Old items, things that aren't needed but might be useful some time, are bundled up, packed into boxes and kept in the storeroom, attic and garage. Many forgotten things stored in the parent's or grandparent's time can be found there. That is the *sanchita* or accumulated karma. It is the accumulated karma of this life which determines the prarabdha for the next life when a new cycle begins.

FIVEFOLD KARMAS

How does the vedic system classify karma?

Swami Satyananda: The vedic seers created a technology of karma. They divided the karmas into categories in order to dispense with them in a systematic manner. Suppose there are many objects in a big house, most of which are quite unnecessary. The easiest way to deal with the unnecessary

objects would be to throw everything away, but that method is not advisable, as some things are still useful and others must be disposed of in other ways. All the objects will have to be classified into different categories: to throw away, to give away, to sell, to burn and to keep.

This is how one would classify the objects which are stored in a house. Similarly, karma is the broad and abstract term for all the experiences stored in one's consciousness. What should be renounced and what should be kept? Going to the toilet is karma and eating is also karma. In the *Bhagavad Gita* it is said (3:8):

Shareerayaatraapi cha te na prasidhyedakarmanah.

. . . and even the maintenance of the body would not be possible for you by inaction.

Supposing one decides to throw away all the objects in the house, but to keep a few good hangers. What would one do with the hangers? Hang them in the closet, not keep them underneath the bed. That is also how karmas should be fixed.

The Vedas have given the following fivefold classification of the karmas. The first category is *nitya karma*, which means daily, routine actions. The second is *naimittika karma*, actions done for some time, for some reason. The third is *kamya karma*, actions done with certain selfish motives. The fourth is *Nishiddha karma*, prohibited actions, which should not be done. The fifth is *prayaschitta karma*, actions done as atonement for the karmas of the past. These five types of actions come under the general term of karma.

What are nitya karmas?

Swami Satyananda: Nitya karmas are the usual daily actions of bathing, washing, cleaning, sleeping, eating, excreting and so on. A person gets up at four o'clock in the morning, takes a bath, goes to the toilet and does whatever is necessary. Afterwards he will eat and go to the office and come back

home in the evening. This type of action forms the daily routine. Nitya karmas can be regular or irregular. They may be within the scope of discipline or indiscipline. A person may eat in the middle of the night or precisely at six o'clock every evening. He may remain awake during the night and sleep during the day, or go to sleep at nine or ten o'clock in the evening and get up at four o'clock in the morning and work throughout the day. Nitya karmas are the disciplined and undisciplined actions of daily life.

Nitya karmas do not create any substantial effect or karma. They do not produce any seed of karma. Nitya karma is a seedless and fruitless action. They form habits, but they do not create samskaras which would affect one's life in the future. When nitya karmas are performed properly, however, they help to reduce the effects of the samskaras from previous lives. Nitya karmas do not produce a result, but they do affect the other karmas. It is a harmless group of karma. Most of the karmas comprise both cause and effect, but nitya karma is neither a cause nor an effect.

At the same time, the other forms of karma are indirectly affected by the quality of nitya karma. If one is disciplined in the daily karmas, their effect on the other karmas will be positive. If one is undisciplined, their effect will be negative. Therefore, in yoga emphasis is laid on regularity and discipline in daily life. One's day-to-day actions, which one is compelled to do, may not be the cause of any serious samskara, but at the same time they can become an aid in the management of other karmas.

What are naimittika karmas?

Swami Satyananda: The second category of karma is naimittika karma, obligatory karmas, where one is obliged to earn, to feed one's children, to educate them, or to build a house. They are both ordinary and religious karmas. Suppose a person observes certain religious days every month. On those days he performs certain actions, such as worship, pooja, chanting and feeding the poor, which he

does not do every day. Those actions are called naimittika karma. Another example is a marriage ceremony, which involves so many actions.

In naimittika karma the involvement of ego is a serious matter. Naimittika karma creates samskaras as long as one thinks, feels or believes that these actions are performed for oneself. If they are done with attachment, with involvement of ego, they produce seeds. One undergoes ups and downs. But if this karma is performed with a sense of complete detachment, without involving the ego, naimittika karma will not produce any result at all. One can attend marriage ceremonies and religious functions. One can participate in any ceremony being performed on any occasion, for any reason, as long as one maintains the feeling of detachment, rather than involvement. In this way one becomes free from the notion of doership. The yoga aspirant should understand his relationship with the naimittika karmas, which are performed many times during the course of his life.

What are kamyas karmas?

Swami Satyananda: *Kamya karmas* are actions performed with desire, where ego and ambition are completely involved. This is the third degree of karma, which is really obstinate, complicated and binding. When there is a certain motive behind an action, it is kamya karma. When the ego is involved in an action, it is kamya karma. One may have the desire for pleasure, profit or material progress. These are the personal motives which compel one to act. The spiritual and benevolent principles of life are overlooked during the performance of these acts. The fact that somebody else is losing or undergoing suffering on one's account is overlooked. Some people are slightly more reasonable and considerate, but most are absolutely blind to this fact. In the passion of the motive they overlook humanitarian principles.

Kamya karma brings dangerous and deadly karma. It produces thick and gross karma, which is the greatest

barrier between man and knowledge. Such actions create a complicated circuit of karma. They produce an explosion of karma, as others are involved. In this way the suffering of many people becomes a part of one's karma. These actions create *samskaras* in other people, which link one to them in the future. This becomes the basis of interaction between various individuals in this life and in other lives. Why should one cause pain or give happiness to another? Why does this interaction take place? This interaction has a history in one's karma. But it is not easy to understand, as karma moves in such complicated and mysterious ways.

Karma karmas can be both individual and collective. When these karmas relate to individual interactions, there is individual suffering or individual happiness. However, sometimes these karmas are collective. For example, when the textile mills were first established in India by the British, millions of people became unemployed. Thousands died of starvation at that time, as their cottage industry of weaving was completely destroyed. So, this karma may have benefited one group, but the other group was suffering. Their suffering also generated karma, and that karma was linked with the first group. In this way, collective karmas are being generated in the world all the time, and no one can escape them. The Romans disappeared, the Egyptians disappeared, the Babylonians disappeared and many more will disappear due to collective karmas.

The forces of karma are so mysterious. In some other life one may have been related to a person who is suffering his karmas in this life. Therefore, one should be cautious in regard to the generation of karma. In *nitya* karma one can be a bit careless; it may only cause a little indigestion. In *naimittika* karma one may also be a little careless. The festivity may not be conducted properly, but it will still go on. But one can't afford to be careless in karma, as it will affect one directly and indirectly.

Whichever result an action performed with desire may bring, it will cause unhappiness. Therefore, the doer of

kamyā karmas should have the philosophy by which the effects of these karmas can be offset. For this purpose nishkāma karma yoga has been taught in the *Bhagavad Gita*. *Nishkāma karma*, or action without desire or motive, should be performed in order to neutralize the effects of kamyā karma. Nishkāma karma creates an indirect balance between the two forms of karma. Therefore, whatever action one does, a part of it should be dedicated to something in which one's personal intentions are not involved. Normally, a selfish motive or interest lies behind whatever one may do, but a portion of one's karma should be completely unconditional and charitable.

One performs acts of *himsa*, violence, hatred and exploitation – knowingly and unknowingly one destroys things. Therefore, one must compensate for these acts of destruction by acts of giving life. In nishkāma karma, one feeds animals, plants trees, looks after plants and helps the needy. Those who are incapable of managing by themselves should be given aid. One's ego and selfishness are not involved while helping others. Such acts are called nishkāma karma.

This type of karma is selfless action, doing something for someone where the ego is not involved. A person does something for someone who is not his kith and kin. He helps them, pleases them, saves or protects them. That is called selfless action. The ego is not involved at all. One is working but the 'I' is not involved. The interest is involved, the senses are involved, the body is involved, the awareness and alertness are involved, the efficiency is involved, but the ego is not involved.

When the ego is involved, there are setbacks. When the ego is not involved, there are no setbacks. When there is attachment, there is pain; when there is no attachment, one gets nothing! In the *Bhagavad Gita* it is said (3:9):

*Yajñarthāatkarmaṇo'nyatra loko'yam karmabandhanah;
Tadartham karma kaunteya muktasangah samaachara.*

The world is bound by actions other than those performed for the sake of sacrifice. Therefore, O son of Kunti, do thou perform action for the sake of sacrifice alone, free from attachment!

What is Nishiddha karma?

Swami Satyananda: Nishiddha karmas are prohibited acts. Many times on account of selfishness one forgets that one is doing something which should not be done. Such acts may not be prohibited by the government, but they are prohibited by the laws of nature. One does not wish to be killed, therefore one should not kill others.

There are many forms of Nishiddha karma. These karmas are not based on social ethics as these values change from generation to generation. What was considered wrong a few years back is considered right today. Religious and political values also change from time to time. But certain values that relate to the nature of an individual do not change. There are some acts which individuals have always considered and will always consider wrong. These are the Nishiddha karmas, eternally prohibited acts. The person who performs a prohibited act will always criticize the other party for the same prohibited act.

The vedic scriptures give a list of prohibited karmas and their results. Nishiddha karmas have a gross effect on the individual consciousness. When the consciousness becomes gross, it is difficult to enter into deep meditation.

What is prayaschitta karma?

Swami Satyananda: Prayaschitta karmas are those acts which are done as atonement for actions of the past. These are the most important karmas. They are the result of unbiased self-introspection. One does not have to go to church and make a confession, but it is important to acknowledge and accept everything one has done with absolute honesty. If one has done a wrong act, one must accept it, but instead one tries to justify oneself and becomes more obstinate. A part

of oneself, however, is always whispering, “No, my dear, you are wrong.” If one listens carefully, that faint murmuring will be heard clearly.

The basis of prayaschitta is acceptance of the truth about oneself to oneself. Actions do not need to be measured by a yardstick to prove that an action was wrong or right. There is an eternal discriminative ability in every sensible person. This is not the creation of any society, culture or religion. A barbarian also has this understanding; he has certain eternal values. Warmongers and savages have destroyed cultures, but the individual knows and accepts what is right and what is wrong.

What are some forms of prayaschitta karma?

Swami Satyananda: Many types of prayaschitta karma can be done by anyone, such as fasting, silence, prayer and vigil, but others cannot. Penance or austerity is strong prayaschitta karma. In India, when a person realizes that he has done many wrong acts, he goes to his guru or elders to seek advice. They may suggest that he should do penance in the Himalayas to purify his karmas.

The Upanishads describe meditation on *Aum* as a prayaschitta karma. It is advised to concentrate the mind on *Aum*, just as an archer concentrates on the point where he aims his arrow. This concentration produces a type of heat called *yoga agni*, or yogic fire. When the yogic fire is produced through the practices of hatha yoga, it affects the body. If this fire is produced through raja yoga, it affects the mind. The yogic fire burns the effects of prohibited karma. In fact, the Upanishads state that the person who meditates on *Aum* in the night will be free from the effects of Nishiddha karma in the morning. Even a person who has caused an abortion will become free. In fact, there is a prayaschitta for abortion.

Every culture and religion has its own prayaschitta karma, but in my opinion, it is more important to change one's nature. By transforming one's nature, the creation of further negative karma can be avoided.

What is the effect of prayaschitta karma?

Swami Satyananda: There is a split in opinion on this question. Some say the effects of the karmas that have been done must be undergone, right or wrong. No amount of atonement, or prayaschitta, will help. But others say that atonement does help. The thinkers have not come to any final conclusion yet, but in my view karmas have to be undergone; the law of karma is inexorable. The human mind is weak and people can't eliminate the effects of karma just by a process of religion. If one can't remove an idea from the mind, how can one remove a karma which one does not even know?

Instead of trying to eliminate the karma it would, therefore, be much better to change the quality of the experience. It is possible to change the quality of human experience. One must still pay the penalty for the karmas one has done. One must reap both the good and bad effects, but there is a difference in the quality of the experience. The same karmic effects can be faced with two qualities of experience. In the ordinary quality of experience the sufferings are felt so acutely, so painfully, that one can't bear them. But with the transformed quality of experience, one does not feel the sufferings at all. One just knows they are there.

GOOD, BAD AND MIXED KARMAS

Can karmas be classified as good or bad?

Swami Sivananda: This world is a relative plane, containing good and bad, and a mixture of both. There can be neither absolute good nor absolute bad in this world. That which gives comfort and pleasure, which is beneficial to the world and to oneself is good. That which gives discomfort, uneasiness, pain and misery, which is not beneficial to the world and to oneself is bad. That which gives pain and misery to some and pleasure to others is a mixture of good and evil. Any action that takes one towards God is virtuous, and that action which takes one away from God is bad. The *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali state (4:7):

Karmaashuklaakrishnam yoginastrividhamitareshaam.

The actions of yogis are neither white nor black; of others they are threefold.

White karma means virtuous actions, good karma. Black karma means actions which involve vice, bad karma. The actions of a yogi cannot be classified as good or bad. As his mind is purified through sadhana, he has no selfish motive underlying his actions. Yogis do not operate through the lower mind. They operate through *nirmana chitta*, the consciousness beyond the mind. While a yogi does karmas which are neither good nor bad, the karmas of all others are of three types.

The people in this world operate through the lower mind and senses. The body and mind are the vehicles or medium of karma. When karmas are performed through the body, mind and senses, they bring about three effects: good, bad and mixed karmas, *shubham*, *ashubham*, *mishritam*. Ordinary people, who live in the world of the body, mind and senses, and do not know the secret of nishkama karma, have to undergo suffering.

What is good and what is evil?

Swami Satyananda: The question of good and evil has never been solved. The ultimate definition of good that western thinkers have given is that which brings maximum good to the maximum number of people. The philosopher Immanuel Kant said, "The maximum good brings happiness to the maximum number of people." Lord Buddha also taught his disciples, "Keep moving for the good of many", but no one really knows what is good and what is bad.

Why does evil exist within the individual and in the world?

Swami Sivananda: The universe contains two dynamic twin forces, good and evil, that are born of the same father. They are *dvandvas*, or opposites, and have no

independent existence. Evil is a destructive force and good is a constructive force. There is neither absolute good nor absolute evil in this universe. Evil exists to glorify good and has no independent existence apart from good. Wherever there is evil there is good, wherever there is good there is evil. One cannot expect absolute good in this relative world. Absolute good is found in Brahman alone. Good and evil dwindle into an airy nothing from the viewpoint of the basic reality which lies behind them.

Good and evil are mental creations. When good and evil are transcended, one reaches the abode of supreme peace and immortality. For a jnani, who has knowledge of the higher self, there is neither good nor evil. The 'why' of evil can only be understood when *atmajnana*, direct knowledge of the self, is attained. A person should not rack his brain in this regard. It is a transcendental mystery that only Brahman, the supreme consciousness, knows. The finite intellect that is conditioned in time, space and causation cannot find a solution for the problem of evil. When one is fully established in one's own self or *swaroopa*, evil and good vanish altogether.

Therefore, one should not put the cart before the horse. Evil can be transmuted into good by changing the mental attitude or angle of vision. Tamas is bad and sattwa is good. Tamas should be converted into sattwa and then evil is transmuted into good. This same principle applies to all the different forms of evil and good. Selfishness, passion, greed and pride are bad. Selflessness, brahmacharya, generosity and humility are good.

Out of bad, good often comes. Destruction is necessary for regeneration and reconstruction. People consider a heavy torrent of rain at the time of harvest to be bad, but God knows what is good for His children. He has brought this rain to wash the earth of germs, which produce disease. Without this rain, there would be a pandemic of infectious disease, which could sweep away the whole population. Mark the merciful nature of the Lord! Do not try to probe into the divine mysteries, as they will baffle the poor intellect.

War is an evil, but good often comes out of it. A war cannot break out without the sanction of the Lord. He goads the minds of the minister, king, dictator, president and commander-in-chief to wage war. It is war that produces chivalrous warriors, fearless soldiers, undaunted and intrepid statesmen. War makes a man fearless. Fearlessness is a great qualification for a spiritual aspirant. War brings the pride of a ruling power down to dust. War creates mercy, generosity and cosmic love in the hearts of rich people who are misers, and forces them to donate to the helpless widows, orphans and wounded people. Society must evolve through evil. One should accept His mysterious ways and become wise.

Every person performs his allotted actions. A thief must pilfer and a scoundrel must do wrong. The world is a relative plane. Prostitutes, saints, rogues, beggars, kings are all doing their respective duties. Every step of the foot is an attempt to move towards *satchidananda*, truth, consciousness and bliss. Good and evil are relative terms. Evil exists to glorify good. Hatred exists to glorify love. A rogue is not a rogue eternally. He can become a saint within the twinkling of an eye when placed in sattwic company. Saints and rogues, saviours and dacoits are always present in this world, for it is a world of duality.

Happiness and misery, pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat, life and death, good and evil are two sides of the same coin. Evil cannot exist without good. Life cannot exist without death. They are relative terms. Ignorant people want absolute happiness in this world. This is simply impossible and childish. They want life without death, happiness without misery and gain without loss. If one does not want death, one should give up life on the mortal plane. If one does not want pain, one should give up sensual pleasure. Pleasure and pain, life and death are inseparably linked.

Falsehood exists to glorify truth. A prostitute exists to glorify a chaste woman. A drunkard exists to glorify a

teetotaller. This world is a marvellous museum. If only saintly, honest and sober people existed in this world, it would be like a prison. Variety is the *swabhava* or nature of prakriti to keep up the charm of this world. One should transcend the pairs of opposites, or dvandvas, and rest in the non-dual and absolute Brahman. There alone absolute good, absolute bliss and absolute knowledge are found.

Why did God create evil, such as the desire to kill or hurt others?

Swami Satyananda: If only God had made the rose without the thorn! He created the sweet guava and papaya, but why did he create the bitter neem? I remember a line written by Mirza Ghalib: “*Gule bekhar khuja ast?*” The word *gul* means ‘flower’, *bekhar*, ‘without thorns’, and *khuja ast*, ‘where is it’. Where can one find roses without thorns? What is the basis of this strange world of God? Where there is light, there is also darkness. The shadow resides where there is light! If there were no light, there would be no shadow.

Similarly, where there is virtue, vice is sure to exist. Vice is the shadow of virtue. Evil exists to highlight the greatness of good. It is important to understand this or else one will hate anything that is negative or bad. Society hates thieves, puts them behind bars and then releases them, thus ensuring that they become double crooks. Good and evil exist in this world in order to balance each other. If everyone were to become good, there would be no fun in life. One cannot enjoy life in the absence of evil. That is why God created the devil.

Life becomes monotonous if the son is good, daughter is good, wife is nice, husband is nice, father is good, mother is nice, house is beautiful and there is plenty of money. There needs to be a contrast. The devil is the contrast to the divine and that is why God created the devil. The devil has been created to highlight the glory of the divine. Without the devil, who would glorify the divine? Who would sing the praises of the divine? It has been beautifully stated in the *Ramacharitamanas* (Balakanda, doha 6):

The creator created both good and bad,
But the Vedas separated the objects of creation
According to their qualities.
Thus originated affluence and adversity,
Vice and virtue, day and night,
Saint and villain, good and bad.
The creator made beings animate and inanimate,
Of all qualities, both good and bad.
Saints, like the swan, have the capacity
To extract the good from the bad.
From a mixture of milk and water,
The swan takes out the milk and leaves the water.
Similarly, the saints are able to take the good
And leave out the bad from a mixture of both.

Everywhere in life one finds this polarity, this duality. That is why happiness and sorrow, good and evil, day and night, civilized and uncivilized, saintly and wicked exist everywhere, side by side. This is a world of contrasts. God did not make it this way. It came into existence by itself. Where He made light, shadows appeared. Birth came and along with it death. He made happiness and along with it came sorrow. All this happened by itself.

Why does God make some people do evil acts?

Swami Sivananda: The mortal in the relative plane does good and evil acts. Evil is also a negative good. Everyone learns lessons in this world and evolves. God is only a witness. He does not make men do evil acts. An individual has intellect and free will, but out of egoism does actions according to his own sweet will and reaps the fruits of evil actions. One can attain perfection and immortality through long struggle. When the sattwic nature, or purity, increases by practising virtuous actions, one becomes divine. God is not responsible.

How are good and evil created within?

Swami Satyananda: Everything that is born is a result of the union between purusha and prakriti. Everything that takes birth, everything that manifests in the universe, from the smallest bacteria to the largest constellation, is a product of the union of purusha and prakriti in different realms. There is union in chemicals, in minerals and in the vegetable, animal and human kingdoms. Even in the mind, when a thought that is masculine in nature meets a thought that is feminine, a result accrues in the form of good or evil, purity or impurity. Good and evil are both born out of the union of two types of thoughts. Thoughts constantly unite, so one has to be careful about what kind of bride or bridegroom one chooses in one's mind. The mental union is important. A good, holy or pure thought is the result or the son of the union between two forms of thinking.

What is the basis of good and evil?

Swami Satyananda: The mind is the basis of good and evil. It is powerful and can manifest anxiety or balance. The same mind wants to commit suicide at one instant and realize God the next. This means there are two stages of the mind: the untamed mind and the trained mind. A yogi has a trained mind, but an animal does not. In man there is an animal, a man and a god. Once a man has trained, educated and disciplined his thoughts and emotions, his actions will be controlled, and he can think of making his mind free.

What is the yogic approach to evil tendencies?

Swami Satyananda: In yoga one does not find the word evil. Yoga talks about samskaras and states of consciousness, not about evil. I believe evil tendencies are undeveloped spiritual tendencies, just as there are raw vegetables and cooked vegetables. Evil tendencies exist at a particular state of consciousness, relative to a certain idea. Yoga does not talk about sin as religions do. If any yogic text talks about evil tendencies, that chapter should be removed. Yoga only deals with the development of human consciousness.

Human consciousness was once covered by the cloak of vegetation in the vegetable kingdom, and by the cloak of hair in the animal kingdom. Now this consciousness is enveloped in the human body. Consciousness undergoes certain changes. At lower levels the consciousness expresses its innate nature as hatred, greed and so on. In later development this same consciousness expresses higher qualities, such as love, compassion, selflessness, peace and tranquillity. In this way, the consciousness is developing. There was a period when man was primitive, when the human mind was not intelligent. Man must have come out of those incarnations with the same primal karmas and samskaras. Yoga was discovered by the ancient people so that man would evolve quickly and come out of his instinctive nature faster. Yoga creates a change in the quality of consciousness.

The words 'evil' and 'devil' are religious and biblical terms. They are not used in yoga. One speaks about the problems of human evolution, not about the problem of evil tendencies. A yoga practitioner does not become free from hatred because yoga kills it, but because yoga raises the level of consciousness. Yoga brings about certain changes in the physical grey matter and psychological framework. As a result, that particular tendency called hatred ceases and another tendency is expressed. Humanity was not conceived at one particular moment in the womb of nature. Therefore, although people live together on this earth, from the point of evolution they are all at different levels. No two people move together. Somebody will be attaining nirvana, beatitude, oneness with God, and somebody else will be thinking about how to snatch my watch. It's a beautiful world!

At the age of twenty, I was also an idealist. I was thinking of a world with purity and peace. My teachers were Christian sisters who always taught love, compassion, faith and goodness. When I became entangled with the realities of life, however, I found there was no use breaking this shell. One has to accept the law of nature as it is and, at the same time, do a little bit of brushing here and there. Let the thief

take my watch but, at the same time, he should do some meditation for his personal life, so that he will be a better person in his next incarnation.

Actions which create uneasiness and abnormal feelings in the mind are sins. Cynics dismiss the word sin with a smile of derision. Whenever a person's conscience pricks him over an action he has performed, that action is sin. Cynics are no exception to this rule. Sin is there, whether they admit it or not.

How can the tendency towards negativity within be overcome?

Swami Satyananda: There are divine as well as evil elements within everyone. The war between the dark and the divine forces is the real tension in life. Everyone is responsible for their own awakening and downfall. In this world, both good and evil exist side by side. Light and dark follow each other. Those who are enlightened are aware of the fact that they have to develop greatness and nobility in their hearts. Every being is like a delicate young plant. It has to be protected for some time, otherwise wild animals may trample it, insects and pests may devour it, or frost may destroy it in one night.

Everybody must do something to protect this young plant, which is the inner self. Wealth and a beautiful home cannot protect the inner self. Intellect cannot provide protection, nor can the police and military forces. Only the individual can protect his inner self, and in order to do so, a different quality of mind has to be developed.

Who is going to direct the destiny of mankind? Who is going to be one's master or guide? Who is the controller or director of one's life? It should be oneself, but at the moment, temptations and passions govern one's life.

Every temptation can be resisted with a strong mind, but can such a mind be developed? Through yoga one becomes one's own master and gains control over the forces of life. Evil must end and good must evolve into eternal good in each life. Good and evil cannot coexist in the same person at

the same time. Where there is good, there is no evil; they are like two sides of one coin. Beyond good and evil is spiritual life, but that age is yet to come. It has been said:

One who has transcended good and evil,
Who is free from desire and craving,
He alone is beautiful, be he king or beggar.

How can the tendency to do wrong be overcome when the wrong action offers instant gratification?

Swami Sivananda: One must try to do such actions that bring maximum good and minimum evil. Good work produces good effects and evil work causes bad effects. But if one knows the secret of karma, one will be absolutely free from the bondage of karma. That secret is to work without any attachment or egoism.

Karma does not compel one to do wrong actions, although samskara does to a certain extent. God has bestowed free will on man with which he can make or mar his career. Man does not have *bhoga swatantrata*, the freedom to enjoy or suffer; this factor is governed by karma. But he does have *karma swatantrata*, the freedom to do good or evil. He can substitute good samskaras in place of the old vicious samskaras by *vichara shakti*, willpower, and the continued practice of good actions.

The belief that evil actions give immediate happiness is the greatest temptation and the greatest obstacle to the cultivation of virtue. These negative tendencies can be removed only by discrimination and experience. Contemplation on the ultimate and permanent damage done to the soul of man by evil actions, and the harm he is causing to the entire society by his evil actions, ought to compel a man to desist from such actions, however pleasant it may appear superficially. There is no shortcut to this really serious problem; the wicked heart will not yield easily. Therefore, the ancients have exalted *satsang*, constant association with the wise and spiritually evolved persons. Only *satsang* can remove these wrong notions from the mind of the wicked one.

One does not have the right to force a person to do wrong, so does one have the right to force a person to do good?

Swami Satyananda: A man goes wrong by himself and a man becomes right by himself. If a man goes wrong on account of society, however, he can also become right on account of society. There are some people who spoil others, and there are some who make others right. Since every individual is interrelated, everyone is affected. Even if one has not done any wrong or is not responsible for making others do wrong, what right does one have to correct another? Sometimes evil is suppressed by personal efforts to do good or to make someone do good. The moment the control is loosened, however, the evil comes up again with redouble force. This is the law, so there is no use suppressing evil and encouraging good. Good and evil will always be there.

This is easy to understand in theory, but difficult to practise. If a servant steals something, one may say, "All right, let him evolve by himself." This is the saintly way. Once a thief came into the house of a saint and took some chapattis. The saint said, "Wait a minute, I am bringing the ghee also." This is the peculiarity of saints, but most people never think that way. Whether it is due to ignorance, a sense of egoism, or a kind of selfish responsibility, one feels some duty towards the evolving society. No one knows the reality. The whole cosmos is moving under certain laws or forces which compel one to think or act in particular ways. Everything is moving under the great cosmic law, so why worry about good and bad? But still one worries.

OTHER CLASSIFICATIONS OF KARMA

What are the different ways of classifying karmas?

Swami Sivananda: Karma has been classified in many ways. Karma is classified as threefold, as *kayika*, bodily, *vachika*, verbal, and *manasika*, mental karma.

There is a general classification of karma into five groups. *Satkarma*, good deeds, *dushkarma* or *kukarma*, bad deeds,

akarma, inaction, *mishrita karma*, mixed deeds, and *vikarma*, perverted actions. By *satkarma* one attains the world of devas; by *dushkarma*, *vikarma* and *akarma* one attains the lower births, animals, birds or trees, and by *mishrita karma* one attains human birth.

The nature of karma for an individual is twofold. *Swadharma* is one's own duty as ordained by the scriptures, and *paradharma* are the duties prescribed for another.

There are two kinds of karmas: *sakama* and *nishkama* karma. *Sakama* includes all spiritual sacrifices and other duties enjoined for the attainment of *swarga*, heaven, and other worlds. It is attended with birth and death and rebirth, or the wheel of *samsara*. *Nishkama* karma yoga leads to *chitta shuddhi*, purification of the mind, and prepares the aspirant for the light of knowledge. The *nishkama* karma yogi is one whose goal of life is freedom from the wheel of birth and death. *Nishkama* karma is the *sadhana* for the attainment of this freedom.

What are the internal and external forms of karma?

Swami Niranjanananda: There are three main types of karma. The first is the interaction or activity performed within the mind – *manas*, *buddhi*, *chitta* and *ahamkara*. The second is the externalized karma, known as *vacha*, which is interaction in the manifest world with family, friends, society and nation, in which one expresses one's feelings, thoughts and behaviour. The third karma is performed by *buddhi*, the understanding of what is happening externally and internally, the aspects of knowledge, wisdom and recognition. The non-rational feeling of 'I realize' is the karma of *buddhi*.

How can karma be classified differently?

Swami Niranjanananda: The ego and mental karmas manifest as selfish karmas. They are called *sakama* karma, which are performed to satisfy one's own needs and ambitions. Another category of karma is *nishkama* or selfless karma, which is

performed to help others. *Sakama* means with desire and *nishkama* means no desire. Nishkama karma is not meant for oneself. Whatever I do for myself will always be sakama. I desire food, I desire clothes, I desire comfort; as long as the idea is 'I desire', it is always for oneself. That is self-oriented or sakama. Nishkama is without desire. 'Without desire' does not mean absence of desire in the mind. There is desire but it is for the greater good, not for one's own personal good.

The second type of karma is social karma. The word *paropakara* means for the benefit of others. Social karma is an action which has a greater reach, not on a one-to-one basis, but encompassing society at large. Living the social paropakara karmas is necessary to overcome the vritti of self-oriented awareness, which is identified with desire. Involvement in paropakara can be seen in the lives of spiritual luminaries, whether it be St Francis of Assisi, Swami Sivananda or Swami Satyananda. Paropakara is the power of compassion which propels one to serve. It is *samajik karma*, actions related to the welfare of society.

Society is not only made up of human beings; many spiritual luminaries have offered their service to insects, birds and animals and protected them, for the feeling of compassion that emanates from within is for all life forms in creation. Life forms which are mute and dumb cannot express the suffering they are feeling, but they are suffering nevertheless. Many saints have identified with that suffering, with nurturing the spirit in that particular life form. There are people who identify with human groups, and those who identify with animals, birds and insects.

These karmas are further strengthened by the force of faith, *shraddha*. One can undertake real paropakara when there is faith. Without faith one just ends up creating a social club for personal gains and ends. Only when faith becomes part of the act does the action become paropakara. Buddha gave this message to his disciples: "O sadhu, O sannyasi, O bhikku, keep on working, keep on striving, keep on walking for the welfare of many and for the pleasure of many

– *bahujan hitaya, bahujan sukhaya.*” Paropakara is expressing the inherent divine qualities, bringing them to life and connecting with everyone. Swami Sivananda said that the ultimate aim of spiritual life is to serve, love and give.

The third kind of karma is destined karma, *prarabdha karma*. The laws of nature and the effect of those laws on human existence is prarabdha karma. Birth, sickness, decay and death is the prarabdha or destined karma of the body. No one can change this karma. One cannot stop the body from decaying and ageing, no matter how many lotions are applied to the face and body, or how many hours are spent at the gym or on a diet. Despite every effort, the body is going to deteriorate day by day. That is the karma of the body, and nothing will change this prarabdha karma. It is the same with the mind. No matter what one does to please it, the mind, which is under the law of prakriti, will continue to develop in its own way. One has no control over prarabdha or destined karmas, which relate only to birth, sickness, decay and death.

The fourth type of karma is *sanchita karma* or accumulated action. It refers to those karmas, experiences or involvements in life which have been registered by one’s consciousness, but have not been able to influence one’s life as yet. They are somewhere there, just like a fixed deposit which has not matured; they are actions done in previous lives. Whatever was done in a previous life is embedded in the subconscious mind, where it remains.

It is impossible to exhaust prarabdha karma. Destiny is unalterable, but the other karmas can be changed. If there are certain samskaras in the subconscious mind and one does not want them to fructify, they can immediately be removed if the method is known. One can interfere with one’s subconscious stuff and also with the present karmas in the conscious mind, but the prarabdha karmas that have to come in the form of suffering and enjoyment cannot be interfered with. If they are interfered with, they come back with redoubled force.

The fifth type of karma is *daiva* karma, cultivating awareness of the transcendental nature, divinity or purity in life. One's spiritual sadhana is daiva karma. Meditation is a daiva karma, a sadhana to experience the transcendental quality of life. The desire to attain harmony and peace, and the right, appropriate effort that is made towards this aim is daiva karma. Creating a state of tranquillity, peace, harmony and luminosity is daiva karma. Therefore, living according to the laws of nature is prarabdha karma. Working for the welfare of others by cultivating positive strengths such as compassion, sympathy and understanding is paropkara karma, social karma. Helping somebody come out of the misery that they may be experiencing in their life at that particular moment is nishkama karma. And helping to attain a goal for oneself is sakama karma.

Is the behaviour required by social conventions also karma?

Swami Satyananda: Before attempting to exhaust karma, one must know what personal karma and social karma are. Personal karma is related to the dharma within and is connected with *kama*, *krodha*, *lobha* and *iccha*: passion, anger, avarice and desire. Social karma is limited to what society tells one to do or not to do. One is told to get up at a particular time in the morning, to eat or to abstain from certain foods, to marry a particular person. This is not karma, it is social convention and bears no fruit. One can either abide by the social code or flout it.

Social conventions and traditions are age-old. If a person doesn't follow these conventions, people say, "He is adharmic. He has touched a fellow of the sweeper caste and eaten food with him, so his dharma has been polluted." Actually, karma does not mean social tradition and behaviour. Supposing in the family everybody eats meat and drinks wine. One who lives in that family will naturally take them too. Such actions will not create karma for which one has to undergo punishment elsewhere. First of all one

has to discern what karma is and what it is not. Any act that is imposed by society according to social or religious events and situations is not karma.

What is the source of karmas from past lives?

Swami Satyananda: There are two types of karma: one is being performed in this life and the other is from past lives. This residual type of karma from past lives is primordial karma. In the *Bhagavad Gita* and the Upanishads, this primordial karma is known as *anadi vasana*, beginningless deep desires. This *vasana* is the latent potential, and one does not know where it has all started. Supposing one takes five kilograms of soil from the ground, puts it in a box and pours a little water on it every day. After five days one will find little shoots of grass growing in it. Where did this grass come from? The cause of this grass was latent in the quality of the soil. If one removes every shoot of grass and continues to sprinkle water, again new grass will come up. This is an analogy to explain primordial *vasana*. The primordial *vasana* is *prakriti*, which means universal nature, and the universal nature is powerful.

Do all the karmas from past lives have to be eliminated before enlightenment is experienced?

Swami Satyananda: There is a universal nature that is trying to make an individual enlightened, but before it gives enlightenment, the primordial karma and *samskara* must be eliminated. If the accumulated experiences were of one life only, it would be easy to wipe the impressions from the mind and make it a clean slate again. But man is reborn to work out the actions of his past lives. He comes with a rich store of *anadi vasana*, beginningless desires, which are the impressions and experiences of many lives. All these block his supreme awareness, and it is his task to wipe them out in the new life given to him. Therefore, an aspirant has to deal with his present as well as immediate and distant past. When the stock of *anadi vasana* is exhausted, there comes the state of perfect balance and peace.

Does karma relate with the three gunas?

Swami Satyananda: Karmas can also be classified according to the three gunas: tamas, rajas and sattwa. The *Bhagavad Gita* (18:25) clearly points out the different approaches to action, according to individual qualities. It defines tamasic karma, the lowest form of action, as follows:

*Anubandham kshayam himsaamanavekshya cha paurusha;
Mohaadaarabhyate karma yattattaamasamuchyate.*

Action undertaken from delusion, without regard to the consequences of loss, injury and (one's own) ability, is declared to be tamasic.

This type of action stems from general ignorance. The individual who performs this type of action is classified as *pashu bhava*, of an instinctive nature. The next form of action is rajasic, and is of a higher level (18:24):

*Yattu kaamepsunaa karma saahankaarena vaa punah;
Kriyate bahulaayaasam tadraajasamudaahritam.*

Action done with longing for gain or for the fulfilment of desires, with egoism, or with much effort, is declared to be rajasic.

Rajasic action is the most common type in the world today. An individual of this temperament is known as *veera bhava*, of a heroic and dynamic nature. The highest form of action is sattwic, and is motivated by understanding (18:23):

*Niyatam sangarahitamaraagadveshatah kritam;
Aphalaprepsunaa karma yattatsaattvikamuchyate.*

An action which is ordained, which is free from attachment, which is done without love or hatred, by one who is not desirous of any reward, is declared to be sattwic.

This sattwic form of action falls within the realm of karma yoga and leads to higher awareness. The person of this temperament is known as *divya bhava*, of a divine nature.

What are the three types of action in relation to the gunas?

Swami Niranjanananda: In order to achieve the meditative process in karma yoga, one has to be aware of the gunas, which are the aspects, qualities or nature of the phenomenal world. These aspects have been divided into three categories: *tamasic*, meaning a state of inertia or ignorance; *rajasic*, meaning a state of dynamism and activity combined with full ego involvement, and *sattwic*, meaning simplicity and equanimity in action. Simplicity in action is the sattwic karma that one is trying to evolve. In the course of evolution, one begins from the tamasic pattern or frame of mind. Tamasic actions are deluding in nature. They are performed for self-satisfaction and often harm another individual. These actions have a limited vision and concept and are subject to the state of ignorance or *avidya*.

On a higher level the next form of action is known as rajasic. These actions are performed for the fulfilment of a personal desire with ego, effort, drive, motivation and expectation of a result, which is self-satisfying. Most of the world's population works on the rajasic level of karma. To go one step beyond the rajasic nature should be the main thrust of a positive ashram-type environment, where karma is done without any dislike, hatred or disturbed feelings, and where the karmas or actions flow from one state to the next. Such karmas uplift the whole group. They do not just satisfy or fulfil the ambitions of one individual.

Sattwic actions are done without any kind of expectation, hatred or dissipation of mind, and flow from harmony to dedication to compassion and to integration of one's personality. Sattwic karma is what one has to evolve and strive for. Once one is able to progress on this path, different states of awareness and realization can be achieved.

How does the quality of action evolve?

Swami Satyananda: The aim of yoga is to gradually lead the individual from the tamasic states to the rajasic states, from doing tamasic actions to doing rajasic actions, and progressively towards a predominantly sattwic state. Of course, there will be fluctuations between these different states: one will sometimes feel tamasic, lazy and dull, at other times rajasic, actively inclined and so on. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (14:10):

*Rajastamashchaabhibhooya sattvam bhavati bhaarata;
Rajah sattvam tamashchaiva tamah sattvam rajastathaa.*

Now sattwa arises, O Arjuna, having overpowered rajas and tamas; now rajas, having overpowered sattwa and tamas; and now tamas, having overpowered sattwa and rajas!

But through yoga it is possible to become predominantly sattwic in temperament. This is the launching pad to higher states of consciousness. The culmination of yoga leads one to the experience of a state that is beyond the gunas, beyond the classification of tamas, rajas and sattwa. This state is called *gunatita*, which means beyond the mind, senses and play of nature. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (14:23–25):

*Udaaseenavadaaseeno gunairyo na vichaalyate;
Gunaa vartanta ityeva yo'vatishthati nengate.*

*Samaduhkhasukhah svasthah samaloshthaashmakaanchanah;
Tulyapriyaapriyo dheerastulyanindaatmasamstutih.*

*Maanaapamaanayostulyastulyo mitraaripakshayoh;
Sarvaarambhaparityaagee gunaateetah sa uchyaate.*

He who is seated like one unconcerned, who is unmoved by the gunas, yet knows that the gunas are active, who is centred in the Self and moves not, (23)

Who is the same in pleasure and pain, who dwells in the Self, to whom a clod of earth, stone and gold are

alike, who is the same to the dear and the unfriendly, who is firm, and to whom censure and praise are as one, (24)

Who is the same in honour and dishonour, the same to friend and foe, abandoning all undertakings, he is said to have crossed the gunas. (25)

And, in the *Bhagavad Gita* (14:19–20):

*Naanyam gunebhyah kartaaram yadaa drashtaanupashyati;
Gunebhyashcha param vetti madbhaavam so'dhigachchhati.*

*Gunaanetaanateetya treendehee dehasamudbhavaan;
Janmamrityujaraaduhkhairvimukto'mritamashnute.*

Having crossed beyond the three gunas from which the body is evolved, the embodied one is freed from birth, death, decay and pain, and attains immortality. (19)

When the seer beholds no agent other than the gunas, knowing that which is higher than them, he attains to My Being. (20)

What are sat karma and asat karma?

Swami Satyananda: *Sat* means 'truth' and *karma* means 'action'. My definition of *sat* is not philosophical; I take it in a positive sense. *Sat* is a Sanskrit word meaning 'positive' or 'real'. In the *Bhagavad Gita* (17:26) it is said:

*Sadbhaave saadhubhaave cha sadityetatprayujyate;
Prashaste karmani tathaa sachchhabdah paartha yujyate.*

The word *Sat* is used in the sense of reality and of goodness; and so also, O Arjuna, it is used in the sense of an auspicious act!

Sat karma is a good action that will help others or make someone happy and which ultimately helps one. *Sat karma* is any act that helps somebody physically, mentally, spiritually, monetarily or in any other way. Feeding the hungry or

helping a poor person is sat karma, selfless or divine karma. Any act done for others who are helpless, poor and in need is sat karma. Any act done for oneself or one's family is not sat karma. It is just karma as it will produce karma. Any act which harms others is *asat* or negative karma. So there is negative karma, neutral karma and positive karma. Positive karma will erase the other karmas.

From childhood I have been obsessed with the plight of women in society. I feel that women must be allowed to live as freely as men and I have given women every possible opportunity, even in the institutional affairs of ashram life. This seems to be my karma. I've realized it, so what do I do? I've made it clear that the girls in my neighbourhood must be helped through education and marriage. When one performs an act, one is creating more karma, but when sat karma is performed, one is erasing or reducing one's karma. The karma becomes more rarefied and purified. Sat karma is dharma, so do good acts and earn divine merits.

What are sakama and nishkama karma?

Swami Satyananda: *Sakama karma* is action performed with certain desires or motives. *Nishkama karma* is action performed without motives. These are the two important divisions of karma. As a householder one works to support one's family; that is called sakama karma. Afterwards one learns how to do nishkama karma, which is called karma yoga, not karma. Sakama karma is known as karma. Action performed without desire is karma yoga. If one does an action for others and not for oneself, without ego or selfish motive, that is called karma yoga. Action performed with absolute detachment, without expectation of personal reward is karma yoga.

There are people who do karma propelled by desire and there are people who do karma without desire, only out of a sense of duty. If I am a judge and I sentence a man to death in order to protect the community from a dangerous criminal, I am not making a karma that will rebound on me.

But if my motive for having a man executed is personal or biased, I will have to suffer the consequences of karma. This is a universal law.

If one doesn't have expectations, where will the motivation, inspiration and energy to act come from?

Swami Niranjanananda: There are two types of karmas: *sakama*, with expectation and desire, and *nishkama*, without expectation and desire. *Sakama* means avoiding the unpleasant and working for the pleasant, that is, with expectation. The fulfilment of personal desires is based on name, fame, power, money, security and so on. The focus is external, social, personal, self-oriented and self-motivated. At this level one seeks fulfilment and satisfaction. This is the focus of one's actions in the world. Whenever one performs an action, one is responsible for the action and its outcome. The action can result in praise or abuse, wealth or loss. While performing action, one is conscious of what will give gain. If an action is going to lead to abuse, one will try to avoid it. If an action is going to result in loss, one will try to avoid it. One constantly looks for ways to avoid the unpleasant, and this choice is known as *sakama*.

Nishkama means being disinterested, doing the work without expectation. It would be wrong to say that one can be without expectations. There is expectation, but instead of a mundane, worldly expectation, the feeling is directed towards spiritual thoughts and God. *Nishkama*, without expectation, involves action with the mind fixed on spiritual, not worldly, thoughts. A servant has to do many unpalatable activities, but he does so by disassociating from the action. He knows that the outcome is the responsibility of the master, who is giving the instructions. To become *nishkama*, free from expectations, one needs to have the same attitude towards God, to think of whatever one does as *seva*, service to God, to guru and to humanity.

Expectations are caused by association with the world, the senses and objects. Detachment from expectations is

the result of going beyond the normal associations of the mind and connecting the mind with the higher reality. One cannot transform the mind just by thinking that from today one will perform selfless actions. There has to be a feeling, an awareness, of performing action without a vested interest, but as an expression of creativity and to ensure that whatever one does gives good results. One kind of action moves, motivates and inspires the world; the other is only for self-indulgence.

What is karma and akarma?

Swami Satyananda: Great thinkers are confused by this question. The movement and the behaviour of karma are absolutely beyond man's comprehension. Akarma and karma have nothing to do with the nature of expression. Akarma is not a state of inactivity. Akarma is a state where one is *akarta*, non-doer. According to the scriptures, those who have attachment to the objects and events they are concerned with create karma.

Desire plus frustration and love plus hatred make up the whole of life, the whole of one's experience. If one has a proper relationship with and a proper understanding of one's present affairs in life, *samskaras* won't be produced. Those who are detached, but still associate with the people and affairs they are concerned with, don't create any effect; that is called *akarma*. Karma produces *samskara*, but *akarma* does not. Whatever the mind can register from the experiences of one's life is known as karma. What it cannot register is *akarma*.

What is the difference between worldly karma and spiritual karma?

Swami Niranjanananda: Worldly karma is what one faces every day, which makes up one's personality. Spiritual karma cannot be explained in terms of worldly karma. For example, when Ramakrishna saw Vivekananda for the first time he said, "I waited so long for you." The recognition of

a spiritual link was their spiritual karma. If the previous link had not been there, there would have been no recognition. Vivekananda would have been like one of the many disciples who came to Ramakrishna, and not special at all. Spiritual karma has a different role to play than worldly karma. Worldly karma is binding, whereas spiritual karma is liberating.



4

Samskara

DEFINITION AND NATURE OF SAMSKARA

What are samskaras?

Swami Sivananda: Any kind of action produces an impression in the subconscious mind, or *chitta*. This impression is called *samskara*, or tendency. Everything one sees, hears, feels, smells or tastes causes samskara. Even the actions of breathing, thinking, feeling and willing produce impressions. All actions, enjoyments and experiences leave subtle or residual potency impressions in the subconscious mind. A person is a bundle of samskaras. The mind is nothing but a collection of samskaras or impressions, a bundle of habits.

How are samskaras defined?

Swami Satyananda: According to Samkhya and Vedanta, samskara is the ultimate form of human experience. Interaction with different people, places and things produces impressions in the mind. These impressions or samskaras are the residue of experiences. If there is mind, there is samskara. If there is no mind, there is no samskara. In modern psychology samskaras are known as archetypes, the transformed symbols of each and every experience. Thoughts also create samskaras, which are the seeds of mental impressions, known by various names, such as karmas, samskaras, archetypes, conditioning or latent impressions, but it is all the same.

What form do samskaras take?

Swami Satyananda: The impressions of previous experiences within the subconscious mind take various forms. When a voice is recorded by a tape recorder, it has an electronic shape. When a gross experience is reduced to a symbol, it is called samskara. Just as every tree produces seeds, in the same way, every action produces an effect that is stored in the mind in seed form. Every experience creates an effect: happiness or unhappiness, a good situation or a bad situation, prosperity or poverty, disease or health. This effect is converted into a seed, and these seeds remain in the mind in the form of vibrations.

The mango tree cannot be seen within its seed, but it is there in archetypal form. Each and every part of the mango seed can be dissected, but the mango tree will never be found. The seed can be viewed under a microscope, but the tree will never be seen. If it is a mango seed, however, a mango tree will grow from it, never an avocado tree. A mango seed is a symbolic mango tree. In Samkhya philosophy it is called *bija*, which means 'seed'. The existence of the whole tree is encoded in the symbol of a seed.

Innumerable objects have been seen in this world and countless ideas have been contemplated. If all these thoughts and impressions could be fed into a computer and printed out, it would extend from here to infinity. Those billions of impressions and ideas that have come to the mind still exist there in the form of samskaras. All the previous experiences, trillions of them, exist in each person in the form of archetypes. The totality of these archetypes is called karma. These samskaras are stored within the consciousness in the form of vibrations. They are subtle, but they can be seen in the form of events.

What role do samskaras play in one's life?

Swami Niranjanananda: Samskaras are impressions which give birth to a mentality, behaviour, attitude or character. In the absence of samskaras, the attitude, character and nature

are totally different and inactive. Samskaras are the catalysts that connect one with the world. They bring life and give the individual nature and character. One is good or bad due to samskara. One thinks positively or in a pessimistic way due to samskara. One is a believer or a non-believer, angry or peaceful due to samskara.

If someone writes with a black pen on a blank piece of paper, it is called 'writing'. When something is written in a blank, empty life, it is called samskara. It is the writing on a blank personality. Samskara is received from many sources. The maturity of the past life is carried forward as samskara. Samskara is received from the family. People absorb a little bit of the nature of their parents, brothers and sisters. This is parental samskara.

The religious samskara determines if one has faith or not, if one feels the need to connect with God or not. One either accepts or rejects it, but one's life is conditioned for a long period. The culture in which an individual grows up influences character, behaviour and personality. It provides cultural samskara. There is the national samskara; when one has to live according to the systems of a particular nation, samskaras are imbibed.

Samskaras are writings in the mind which shape attitude, thoughts, character, interactions, performance, and whether the mental state is happy or sad. They are absorbed at an unconscious level. One can never decide whether this is the outcome of one understanding in life or another understanding. One doesn't know which samskara is behind what one is expressing. In the course of time, with the conditioning of the mind by the samskaras, a person becomes fixed in one identity. Children are open to all samskaras; they are receiving from everything and everywhere. Children are open and free, but as they grow up they become more and more conditioned.

Samskara is a combination of two words: *sam*, meaning 'collection of', and *akara*, meaning 'form or shape'. Samskara means a collection of ideas in a form. One's character,

personality or nature is a compilation or collection of ideas. New thoughts, desires, passions, frustrations and ambitions come up every time a person deals with his ideas. Those ideas shape and govern one's life, and that is samskara.

Since the word samskara is derived from the two roots: *akara*, meaning 'form or image', and *sam*, meaning 'balanced', the literal meaning of samskara is a balanced, harmonious and integrated image of oneself which needs to be developed. Therefore, samskara also means education, impressions in the mind, leading to creative performance.

Creating these impressions in the mind and educating the total mind is a continuous, life-long process. The entire life pattern, personality, mind, behaviour and attitude is being educated not only by academic schooling, but also by the education that is derived from the mentality of the culture, family and environment. Academic education is only one part of samskara.

Samskara begins at the time of conception. There is ample evidence in the history of humanity to prove that the education of a child begins in the womb. Of course, this is not academic education, but an inner education of basic impressions which determine the quality and future direction of life. This samskara or inner education manifests later on in the course of life in the form of attitudes, behaviours, performance and in many other ways.

How does karma relate to samskara?

Swami Satyananda: All of one's thousands, millions and trillions of previous experiences are stored within in the form of archetypes or *samskaras*. They are in such a vast number that one can't imagine it. The totality of these archetypes is called karma, which is responsible for incarnation. This karma is responsible for destiny and is the basis for evolution.

Whenever the soul is affected by an experience of life, it is known as samskara. Whatever the mind can register from the experiences of life is samskara. Over time one makes a transition from animal to human, and from human to divine.

This human birth is an important stage of evolution. Each impression that is related to one's existence in life must be registered, known and understood, and that is *samskara*. Just as a tree produces seeds, a person constantly produces *samskaras* in every moment of life. The movie camera continuously captures the movements outside; similarly, the inner mind is always photographing everything that takes place in one's life.

Whatever one is doing at present and has done earlier is stored in the form of archetypes, or seed impressions, deep in the memory and is never destroyed. The images of thousands of men and women one has come across, the millions of ideas one has thought, the thousands of actions one has done in the past are all registered within. The inner consciousness registers each and every thought that passes through the mind. These impressions are known as *samskaras*, and they form *karma*. An action becomes an impression or *samskara* and that motivates an action or *karma*. If I hate someone or love someone, I create *karma*. If I have attachment for someone, I create *karma*.

Karmas are stored as *samskaras* in the form of microscopic seeds, atoms or units. One's memory contains millions and trillions of archetypes, or *samskaras*, which are the products of experiences in life, the products of *karma*. These archetypes comprise the seeds of lives which one has undergone in various incarnations from invisible to visible. This *karma* is also responsible for one's future incarnation.

Karma is also the basis of desires and cravings. *Karma* is like a seed. It hibernates within one's being, just as a seed is stored, and remains there for many years. At the proper time it becomes activated and starts affecting one's life and the way one expresses oneself. One must express oneself. It can't be avoided, and that expression depends on the *karmas* and *samskaras*.

Who knows what forces led me to take *sannyasa* and to give lectures on yoga? These were not only the movement of my tongue or the action of my brain. Behind the actions

there must be a series of incidents from my past life, which are coming forth together and expressing themselves in the form of this present action. What are the forces that compel one to understand the lessons of yoga? Is it a brainwave, an action, or a function of the eye or eardrum? Behind the apparent, gross and physical personality of the senses, body and mind there are samskaras, which try to express themselves in the form of behaviour, thoughts and actions.

Some people can only express these samskaras by becoming criminals, others by becoming swamis, saints, charitable and generous. Whatever one may do, one must express one's existence through the actions of the body, mind, senses and intellect, and that is karma.

Suppose, however, I am recruited and sent to war. I may kill many people in battle; that is my action, but it is not my karma. On the other hand, if I kill people out of hatred, it is karma, as it influences my mind and personality. Thus, karma also means samskara, the impression of an occurrence in life on the mind of an individual, as well as action. Karma is the chain of actions performed by a person in life, or it is the effects of all the activities in life.

What is the beginning and what is the end of samskaras?

Swami Sivananda: Samskaras are the root cause of future births, experiences of pleasure and pain, and again death. Everyone is born with samskaras. The mind at birth is not like a blank sheet of paper. It contains all the impressions of thoughts and actions from the previous births. Samskaras are the latent potentialities. They are generally indestructible, although they can be fried in toto, but only by asamprajnata samadhi. The *Yoga Sutra*s of Sage Patanjali (1:18) gives the following definition:

Viraamapratyayaabhyasaapoorvah samskaarashesho'nyah.

Asamprajnata is preceded by a continued study of stopping the content of the mind. In it the mind remains in the form of traces.

How are samskaras formed?

Swami Satyananda: Samskaras are formed through action and experience in various lives. Every action that is done with a motive, consciously and intentionally, immediately forms into a potent seed. Just as a tree produces fruit and seeds, in the same way, every person produces samskaras. All the karmas that a person does in life are immediately transformed into seed form and remain embedded as samskaras in the deeper consciousness. They remain there until the time comes for them to germinate, grow and manifest. Samskaras are formed in exactly the same way that a seed is formed from a particular flower or fruit.

The second aspect of karma is *jñana*, knowledge, derived from sensorial experience, such as seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. This knowledge is called perception, which takes place through the *jñanendriyas*, or sensory organs: eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin. From perception comes cognition, which arises through the *antahkarana*, or organs of mind: manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara. Each and every karma, sensorial experience and cognition creates an impression on the mind. All these combine to produce samskaras, which are stored in chitta, the storehouse of all samskaras.

Suppose one is bitten by a mosquito. That experience is conveyed through the *jñanendriya* of skin to the *antahkarana*, which transfers it to chitta. There it is stored as an impression, which is the primary stage of samskara. The next time a mosquito comes it will be remembered, as there is an impression of this experience in the mind.

What is the difference between karmas and samskaras?

Swami Niranjanananda: There is a clear distinction between karmas and samskaras. Samskaras are nourishment for the karmas. Karma determines the character or nature of the individual according to the blueprint that he has received, and samskaras are the nourishment that has to be given to the roots of karma. Through samskaras one's karma can

become more intense and powerful. If the right compost is given to a plant, it will grow to be healthy, but if compost is not given, the plant may not be so healthy.

There is a blueprint for everything. Before a car is manufactured or a building constructed, a blueprint is drawn up. Before one comes into this life, there is a blueprint in existence. Life develops according to the blueprint which one has never seen but which is there and which is being experienced, just as one has never seen the blueprint of the car that one sees and uses. Life evolves, grows and develops according to this cosmic blueprint. Each person is a unique individual. No two people are the same, no two people have the same features, the same thumbprint or the same eyes. Each one is unique, and that is their karma.

In order to know the difference between karma and samskara think of karma as the tree and samskara as the nourishment which is given to the tree for its proper growth and development. If negative, restrictive and bad samskaras are imbibed, life is being nourished in the wrong manner, and the mind becomes negative, pessimistic and destructive. But if one is nurtured with the right samskaras, life can be more fulfilling, happy and whole.

How are karmas and samskaras accumulated?

Swami Satyananda: The past can be remembered due to the impressions of past experiences in the brain. These impressions are never lost and they give rise to memory. Every activity that is done by the body is recorded. Inside the mind is a mental video camera which is switched on day and night. From the time of conception inside the mother until the time of consignment to the grave, everything, without exception, is continuously being recorded. Just as the video camera is recording my image and everything I am saying, along with other sounds and images that are taking place within its range, in the same way, there is a non-stop tape of consciousness going on in the human mind, which registers every experience of touch, taste, sound, form and smell.

This mental process of registering continues during sleep and even under anaesthesia in the hospital. The registering stops only when a person dies and the subtle body leaves the physical body. All the experiences that one undergoes in life are constantly registered in the inner self. Each and every thought, experience and event that is undergone consciously and unconsciously in life is registered. In every person this recording system, known as the 'witnessing self', records each and every experience, both objective and subjective. This means that something within each person is constantly observing and recording his whole life. This faculty is called the silent witness, which is always alert and aware.

When a beautiful flower is seen by the eyes, this is known, experienced and understood. There is an awareness of the entire process of influence and impression on the mind. But there are also many impressions in life that influence a person without him knowing it. The deeper layers of personality pertain to the unconscious, and these influences or impressions do not go through the conscious mind. They go straight into the unconscious or sometimes through the subconscious, but not through the conscious mind.

These subliminal or unconscious impressions continue to flow throughout life. The impressions are simultaneously being absorbed on various planes of consciousness, not just on one plane. That is how karmas are collected, consciously, subconsciously and unconsciously. A person who is active in dream or sleep is collecting karma. A person makes karma while thinking and feeling, and even when idle. Karma is constantly being made throughout life.

How are samskaras stored?

Swami Satyananda: The experiences that are registered are eventually transferred to another body. At first they are in the conscious mind, but if they are not used again, they are transferred to the subconscious mind. If they are not used there, they are transferred to the causal or unconscious mind. Each and every experience is indelible. Insignificant

experiences, which may not even be noticed, are still registered in one's consciousness. The three abodes of samskaras are the conscious, subconscious, and unconscious minds. They are three distinct states of mind.

When samskaras surface in the conscious mind, they are in the form of thought. When they are stored at the intermediate level in the subconscious mind, they form the memories and associations in chitta. When they are deeply embedded in the unconscious mind, they form the ego or *ahamkara*.

There are billions of samskaras in this storehouse of karma, preserved with absolute accuracy, like the data on the hard drive of a computer. But this storehouse of memory is formless. It has no shape, weight or dimension; that is the beauty of it. From the time a person is born up to the present moment, however many years have been lived through and experienced, the karmas are all there. The experiences of one's gross life are all reduced to subtle samskaras and nothing is destroyed.

Is it possible for a samskara to reveal itself in a dream?

Swami Niranjanananda: The mind seeks and creates its own images and ideas according to the sensory experiences it has recorded from the past. According to the Upanishads, when the mind begins to create its own visual experiences in the dream state, it can pull out different stored impressions from the consciousness, and samskaras can definitely be among them.

In the dream state it is hard to recognize a samskara. Even when one is consciously aware in the waking state, trying to rationalize a dream is practically impossible. Dreams have a different function of bringing out impressions and memories. The rational aspect is not so well developed that it can have knowledge and understanding of mental or psychic experiences and impressions. Therefore, even when samskaras do manifest in dreams, they will be brushed aside by the intellect as something insignificant, ridiculous, or as

something which cannot be understood, as just a mental fantasy. Samskaras can and do manifest in dreams, but there is no recognition or awareness of them.

How do samskaras survive the death of the physical body?

Swami Satyananda: For centuries the question of immortality has been raised by man. The Egyptians preserved the body in the form of a mummy, thinking that the human being was immortal. The body is not immortal and is subject to constant change, but the thoughts from the age when thinking begins remain for the whole life. Sometimes one suddenly remembers, “Oh, that is what I used to think as a child.” It is possible to remember the thoughts that went through the mind at the age of five or six, even at the end of life. They are still there, stored in the subtle mind. During one’s life the samskaras are stored in the *sukshma sharira*, or subtle body. Just as a seed is responsible for the existence of a plant, this mental seed or samskara, which leaves with the individual soul at the time of death, is responsible for the next birth. The *karana sharira*, or causal body, carries it. The *sthoola sharira*, or gross body, may perish, but not these samskaras.

Which samskaras are carried over into the next life?

Swami Sivananda: At the time of birth the mind is not a tabula rasa or blank sheet; it is a storehouse of samskaras, predispositions, predilections and more. A child is born with all the samskaras from his past experiences which are transformed into mental and moral tendencies and powers. Through all the experiences, whether pleasant or painful, an individual gathers material and builds up a mental and moral infrastructure. Earthly experiences are the building blocks of a person’s intellectual faculty, enabling the mind to evolve through the impressions it receives from the universe via the senses. Many embodied lives are necessary to gather a complete experience of the world.

Everyone is born with inherent samskaras that are embedded, lodged or imprinted in chitta, the store-

house of *prarabdha* karma. During this earthly life many more *samskaras* or experiences are gained through the performance of actions. These are added to the original store and become the *sanchita* or accumulated *karmas*, which will manifest in the future. All the *samskaras* remain in the *chitta* as latent impressions from this life and all the innumerable previous lives from *anadi kala*, beginningless time. In the various incarnations different kinds of *samskaras* are created. Hidden in the *chitta* are the *samskaras* of animal life, peasant life, kingly life and *deva* life. In human life only those *samskaras* which are appropriate to that particular type of birth will operate and come into play. The other kinds of *samskaras* will remain concealed and dormant.

The physical body may die, but the thoughts and *samskaras* of all the actions, enjoyment and experiences continue after death until *moksha* is finally attained. Different kinds of *samskaras* are carried along with the soul each time a body dies. In *swarga*, or heaven, all the earthly experiences of the mind are sorted and analyzed, so that only the essence remains. A merchant who is closing the previous year's ledger and opening a new one does not enter all the items from the past year, but only the balances. Similarly, the spirit hands over to the new brain its judgments on the experiences of a life that is closed, the conclusions that have been reached and the decisions that have been made. This stock passes on to the new life and forms the mental furniture for the new dwelling's real memory.

In this way, the *jiva* is born again in the physical universe with a new frame and bent of mind, according to the nature of the essence extracted on the mental plane. When someone is writing a drama, they stop and go to bed if they become sleepy. As soon as they rise, they continue to write from where they left off the previous night. In the same way, when one is born into a new incarnation, the work that was left unfinished in the previous life is picked up in accordance with the current of *vasanas* or deep-rooted desires from the past lives.

Can the existence of samskaras be demonstrated?

Swami Satyananda: I do not have to prove the existence of samskaras. What was seen four years ago can be recollected today. How does that happen? People interact with one another, and this memory stays with each of them. After four years the memory can be reproduced instantly. Each and every item of life is like the seed of a plant or tree. It is foolishness to think that there are thousands and thousands of trees, but there was no seed.

Every experience and interaction can be reproduced. Even unconscious actions can be reproduced in dreams. The experiences from the age of two years, one year, six months or in the mother's womb can be reproduced in dreams. I have had many dreams of when I was in my mother's womb: what she did, what she thought, what she felt. How did I know these things? I was only a small embryo, four months old in the uterus. How was I able to dream it? I was able to dream it because every thought is indestructible and every experience can be reproduced. Everything that a person experiences in waking or in dream is an effect of some cause.

Many funny things are seen in dreams and regarded as imaginings of the mind, but those dreams are true. Everything that is dreamed has some cause. A dream is an effect, and every effect must have a cause. When something is happening, it is due to something else. Even a little child of one or two years receives impressions from the environment. That small child does not understand them, but understanding is not necessary. These impressions, karmas and samskaras are collected even without understanding them.

INFLUENCE OF SAMSKARAS

How do samskaras determine character?

Swami Sivananda: Actions produce samskaras, impressions or potencies, and these coalesce through repetition to form habits. The sum total of these tendencies in a person is his character. The karmas manufacture character, and character

manufactures will. If the character is pure and strong, the will also will be pure and strong. If virtuous actions are done, the chitta will contain good impressions, resulting in a good character. But if bad deeds are done, there will be negative impressions in the subconscious mind, resulting in a bad character. Good samskaras force a person to do good actions. If there is a great store of good samskaras, this asset will prevent any bad action from being done at all. Mara or Satan can have no influence upon such a person. Their good character is established.

How do samskaras influence one's personality, behaviour and experience in life?

Swami Satyananda: After the impressions are registered, they are transferred to the subtle body as samskaras, and this is the source of secret knowledge. An individual does not know it, but the karmas that have been carried on from previous births are showing their effects. These effects or samskaras germinate in each person at some time in their life, according to their own rules. At the proper time a particular seed will fructify, thus creating that person's destiny, affecting that person's body, mind and life. Therefore, this life is an effect of past karma, and this is so, not only with people, but with everything.

A tree grows, flowers bloom, seeds develop and are scattered everywhere. They remain dormant in the earth for some time until the proper season arrives when there is heat, air and water, and then they grow. Some seeds are destroyed and some are impotent, but most seeds have potential and they will grow. This process reflects the law of cause and effect, which can be seen in all the flowers, trees and plants throughout nature, and in everything in this universe.

Everything about a person's life, including beliefs, destiny, pleasure and pain, abilities and disabilities, are all determined by that law: as is the seed, so will be the harvest. The diseases of the body, problems of the mind, difficulties adjusting to circumstances and the environment

are not necessarily due to the present circumstances, but may be deeply rooted in the impressions or experiences of childhood.

How do samskaras influence one's responses and personality?

Swami Niranjanananda: Samskaras are the impressions which form the conditioning of one's nature to react or respond in a certain way. Samskaras are the library within a DNA molecule, containing everything that one has imbibed. One DNA molecule contains the total information of all the libraries in the world combined. Samskaras are also like that. Samskaras are the inputs of volumes and volumes of mental 'books' which a person carries within and which have been accumulated over millions of years.

The personality is conditioned to respond in a certain way by an internal mechanism, which is unconscious. Samskaras are always unconscious in nature. One is never aware of them until they have passed, and one says, "Oh, that was a samskara." The unconscious response can be triggered at any moment by a movement or alteration in the field of the unconscious mind. When the samskaras come to the surface of the mind, they are powerful. They can manifest in many ways, such as a desire for food or sleep or in the form of a sickness. Samskaras are the unconscious expressions of the human personality.

How does the interaction of samskaras affect behaviour?

Swami Sivananda: Samskaras aid or inhibit one another, like forces. When a person who is seriously ill is seen, the feeling of mercy arises in one's heart. The samskaras of previous merciful actions coalesce, forcing one to serve and help that sick person. Similarly, the samskaras of charitable actions come to the surface of the conscious mind when someone in serious distress and dire circumstances is seen. These combined samskaras force one to help, and one begins to share one's physical possessions with that poor person.

When a samskara or virtuous action comes into play, another samskara of a dissimilar nature may also emerge and come in the way of its fulfilment, creating a fight between a virtuous and a vicious samskara. For example, at the moment when the mind tries to fix itself on God and think of purity, all the evil thoughts and samskaras burst forth with violence and vengeance to fight against the good intention. This is termed the ‘crowding of samskaras’.

Good samskaras can also crowd together and help drive out bad samskaras. The father of Sri Swami Advaitanandaji was a great bhakta of Chandi. At the time of his death, he was semi-conscious but began to repeat all the slokas of the *Chandi Stotra*, which he had learnt by heart while he was young. This is an example of the crowding of spiritual samskaras.

What is the force of samskara?

Swami Satyananda: A person is not just this body; a person is not just habits – a person is something beyond this. The personality is the totality of experience an individual has had, right from the time of conception to the point of the grave, and maybe before and after as well. Samskaras are the residues of experiences. In the soil there is potentiality. During summer the soil is generally dry and grass seldom grows, but the moment it begins to rain, grass springs up everywhere. How could this happen? There must have been grass seeds in the soil. Samskaras were there, and from the samskaras the grass grew.

Samskaras are the dormant potential of man’s existence. Some of them can be experienced in this life and they influence one’s thoughts, actions, philosophy and also reactions. Success and failure, accomplishments and expressions in life are all controlled by the samskaras of life. All actions are influenced by samskaras. Pain and happiness, good and bad actions are due to samskaras, and it is due to samskaras that a person is under the state of hypnosis called maya.

The present state of life is a result of a series of samskaras from the previous incarnation. These samskaras influence the mind. The present incarnation, the present karma, the personality, motives, desires, failures and accomplishments are consequences of the totality of the seed formations which one carries within, even today. They cause incarnations and the whole cycle of birth and death is a result. In every incarnation, new seed formations are added and the old seed formations are experienced and exhausted.

The cause of bondage in the form of samskaras must be eliminated if liberation or emancipation is desired. As Sri Ramana Maharshi said, “Samskara, or predisposition, is the cause of *samsara*, the cycle of births and deaths.”

Samskara is responsible for incarnation and for destiny. It is the basis of evolution. This process of generating samskara has to be stopped so that the process of involution can start; one can stop going forth and start coming back, stop going outside and start coming inside.

How are samskaras expressed?

Swami Satyananda: Every action has a momentum, and at the end of the momentum, a seed drops. First, the seed remains in the form of a memory, and the memory is transformed into a samskara or an archetype. When memories become archetypes, they can no longer be recognized as they are in symbolic form. They manifest in dreams, in meditation and in the thinking processes, even if one does not know it.

Here is an example: a man loses his beloved wife, and after some time this experience of loss becomes an archetype. Once an event is transformed into a symbolic form, it is no longer pictorial but vibrational. Three years after the loss of his wife, the man dreams of a lotus in a lake. He sees a bird swoop down and pluck the lotus. The lotus falls into the lake and disappears. This is the manifestation of the archetype or samskara associated with the memory of his wife's death.

Which action is done, how the action is performed, what is perceived, which thoughts arise, what comes to a person,

each of these becomes an impression in the mind. If this impression is not re-thought, it goes from the conscious mind down to the subconscious and unconscious planes into the storehouse of impressions. There it becomes the past, and if it has no further stimulus, it does not come up again. Often, however, these samskaras do come up again. At the time of expression they come up through signs. They may emerge in the form of recapitulation, memory, dream, during moments of imbalance, emotional fits, or during meditation. They emerge when there is anger, violence, compassion or tranquillity.

These trillions of samskaras which are embedded in the individual consciousness are formless, but have a relationship to one of life's experiences. These experiences are expressed in dreams about animals, fear, or death symbolism, and it is usually difficult to relate those symbols to the actual experiences they represent. They can be understood, but they can't be erased, as every experience passes through various layers of consciousness and is finally embedded in the unconscious mind, the storehouse of karma.

DEALING WITH SAMSKARAS

How can one remove samskaras?

Swami Sivananda: The ignorant person is an instrument in the hands of his samskaras and karmas, but by doing spiritual sadhana and by removing desires and egoism, he slowly gains strength by understanding his real essential nature.

Is it possible for ordinary people to completely escape the cycle of vasanas and samskaras?

Swami Satyananda: For thousands of years, every wise man has thought about this subject. The great prophets and seers have been trying to free man from these twin *rakshasas*, demons. They have described methods, but these have helped only a few people. There is no formula which has freed the masses.

It is not possible for all people to overcome karma, as they are all at different points on the scale of evolution. People may look alike and even think alike; they may belong to the same country, race, tribe or religion, but still their spirits are at different levels. They have a long voyage ahead of them, everybody is moving, but nowhere will two people walking abreast be found. One is released only when the journey's end is reached. Everyone cannot attain liberation at the same moment.

Samskaras multiply of their own accord through a process of permutation and combination, creation and destruction. As one loses some, others are gained. As one evolves, one leaves a host of them behind. If one were able to quantify this process of loss and gain, disintegration and accumulation, by any formula, yoga or method, perhaps in a few years one would arrive at the fulfilment of evolution, which is *samadhi*, realization, *paravidya*, transcendental knowledge, *jnana*, wisdom, *kaivalya*, supreme liberation. One has to sublimate the *vasanas*, the hidden desires must be channelled and samskaras must be faced bravely.

What is the life cycle of samskaras?

Swami Sivananda: The samskaras or impressions of previous births are embedded in the subconscious mind. Whatever a person does or thinks is lodged, printed or indelibly impressed in the layers of the subconscious mind. A person takes fresh births so long as there are samskaras. He will have to take birth again and again until all the samskaras are obliterated or fried up by the acquisition of *brahmajnana*, knowledge of Brahman. The impressions can be burnt or obliterated only by the dawn of the knowledge of *atman*, the supreme self. The death of the samskaras of the *karana sharira*, the causal body, leads to final moksha, the attainment of brahmajnana. When the samskaras are wiped out, brahmic knowledge shines by itself in its own glory.

Although this cycle of *vritti* and *samskara* is beginningless, it has an end when one attains that divine knowledge

and liberation and it ceases to produce any effect on the jivanmukta. Only when the samskaras are burnt up by continuous samadhi will one be free from birth and death. Believe me, a person can obliterate his samskaras by *purushartha* or right exertion. He is not a creature of environment or circumstance. He is the master of his destiny.

In the yogic concept of liberation, why is the removal of samskaras important?

Swami Satyananda: Liberation does not mean going into seclusion, as some imagine, or going to some unknown region, high up in the sky, from which there is no rebirth. Liberation means remaining steadfast where one is, overcoming one's limitations and destroying the chains that bind. It belongs very much to the world. It is a matter of here and now. If one cannot shake off the vasanas or deep-rooted desires which bind one in life, if one cannot overcome the personality deficiencies which are entrenched in the unconscious, how can one experience happiness, bliss and liberation?

Yoga will liberate one from the shackles that bind. Through yoga one can fathom the unconscious and remove layer after layer of the samskaras which hold one back and block the natural self-expression. Millions of samskaras buried in the depths of the mind are always coming up and influencing one's behaviour, personality and destiny. The samskaras that are hidden within act as powerful barriers to spiritual enlightenment as well as day-to-day happiness. If one knows a way around them, one should follow it. I know of no other way, however, except to bring them up and eliminate them.

Once these samskaras are removed, neurosis, mental conflicts, complexes, frustrations and tensions also go, and the power and wisdom which lie dormant within begin to manifest. One who is full of samskaras gains no benefit, but one who has no more samskaras gains merit. When the storehouse of karma is absolutely empty, and the awareness

is passing through the unconscious state, there will be no difficulty in crossing the river of death, or unconsciousness. Only a person of *avidya* or ignorance finds it difficult to go beyond that river. If the samskaras are annihilated, it is easy for an aspirant to go through the states of dhyana and samadhi. One who overcomes all the obstructions of the samskaras will have an unobstructed passage and will attain the ultimate union, yoga.

How can one become free from the grip of samskaras?

Swami Satyananda: The karma of an individual should be expelled. Otherwise one has to undergo and fulfil the commitments of destiny. There is no other way. The *jiva*, or individual soul, bound by avidya, wants to be released. He is like a paralyzed person, who wants to get up but cannot; such a person is the *jiva*. He wants to transcend the limitations of the mind and body, of avidya and maya, but he cannot do it. For that reason he has to fight every moment with his own samskaras. What are those samskaras? They are the demonical nature, the darker forces in man, which are called devils or rakshasas.

If the *jivatma*, the individual soul, is to become free from the limitations of the mind, body and environment, the first thing he will have to do is fight a war against himself. If there is no death in life, there is no evolution. The habits must die and the thoughts must die. The thoughts which one cherished yesterday should not survive today. One should not be bound by old thoughts and habits, which are the most rigid weaknesses of every person. One is so accustomed to one's name, body, religion, habits, culture and ethics. One wants them to survive, but they must die. Everything in life becomes old and useless, and therefore the individual soul has to kill and destroy the superimpositions. After the foreign elements are eliminated, the real element shines forth as powerfully as atomic energy. This is a complete division, a complete disintegration of the foreign matter of the individual personality.

Why is it important to improve one's daily life?

Swami Niranjanananda: Realization is an experience of perfection, of totality, which is more personal and intimate than anything a philosophy or book can ever provide. In order to achieve the experience of perfection and totality, one has to struggle with the mind, with the karmas and samskaras. Evolution of consciousness takes place when one eliminates one's samskaras and karmas. The swamis in the ashram are not working for enlightenment, but to improve themselves, to try to become more perfect.

As the karmas and samskaras are exhausted, maybe one day the realization will suddenly come that one is 'It'. It will never happen, however, by waiting for the searchlight to shine upon one. It is better to make every action perfect or at least to try to make it perfect. It is better to make every thought well-balanced and harmonious, or at least to try. As the consciousness evolves, enlightenment will cease to remain rare and elusive, and will manifest automatically, spontaneously, outside, inside and everywhere.

Should one try to create positive samskaras or eliminate negative samskaras?

Swami Satyananda: Samskaras can be eliminated in a positive or negative way. Instead of blocking, interfering with or trying to eliminate the samskaras, it would be much better to develop, create or initiate stronger samskaras. For example, when a person tries to develop the inner experience, he is creating strong samskaras. Thus, the positive overcomes the negative. In the positive method, one cultivates all the mental, emotional and physical qualities which will saturate the mind with sattwa guna and perfect equilibrium.

Although it is possible to fix the samskaras, this is dangerous for the majority of people. Sometimes in the effort of adjusting, pacifying and eliminating the samskaras, one develops an abnormal personality. Whether through mantra, yantra, tantra or religious practices, do not make the mistake of fighting with the samskaras. This will only disturb

the structure of trillions of archetypes in the brain. What is one going to do with these archetypes? Be positive and don't fight with the base of life.

No one is quite sure if there are samskaras at all. A person may be just a machine – who knows? If so, somebody must be running this machine. Do motor cars have samskaras? Maybe a person is also like that; one can't be sure. Please don't go by faith and belief alone. Be sure not to make that mistake in life; go the sure way. The surest way is to develop a higher, nobler and more sublime attitude to life, and all the positive samskaras will follow. All will be transformed in the course of time.

One does not have to kill the samskaras; one does not have to destroy the base of one's existence. This is a destructive way. Rather one should remove the vasanas, the latent desires and passions. It is not possible to destroy samskaras and exhaust karma! I cannot do it, so I am moving along with my demons. A person should have good samskaras in order to overcome the negative ones. The law is that positive overcomes negative. When a person develops positive karma, positive attitudes and positive qualities in his body, speech, mind and emotions, the negative will naturally be weeded out.

What are the methods to remove samskaras?

Swami Satyananda: There are some forms of karma which can be managed well. It is important that one works out one's karma, otherwise evolution is incomplete. Many ways have been suggested to work out the samskaras. The most important way is expressing and living them. Karma has to be lived and worked out, whether it is good or bad. There is no way of avoiding it.

The karmas are unalterable, like seeds. When they fall from the tree, they sprout. By performing karmas one exhausts samskaras, and the accumulated karmas in the deep layers of consciousness, known as *karmashaya*, are destroyed. Working out one's karma means fulfilment of the

obligations of man's nature and reality. By becoming a swami I am working out my karma. In the same way, everybody is working out their karma through their present incarnation.

The life of a householder was designed not merely to enjoy or while away the time, but in order to work out the rajasic and tamasic properties of nature. A householder has the opportunity of expressing, releasing, and working out his karmas in the form of passions, desires and ambitions, as well as experiencing the agonies, happiness, fears, frustration, hatred, jealousy and thousands of other traits that belong to the lower mind, to tamoguna and rajoguna. The lower nature, in the form of tamas and rajas, is released through this association with the objects of the world. Through the involvement of the ego with every situation, person and experience in life, the lower, dormant nature comes out. Therefore, be involved in everything, and by the involvement of ego with many events in life, work out the karmas.

It must be remembered that without working out these crude and gross karmas, one cannot experience the light that is within. First clean the mirror, then the face can be seen; clean the globe of the bulb and the light will shine through. Thus, within a person the dross has to be cleaned, and that is the purpose of *grihastha* or householder ashrama.

The second way the karmas can be worked out is by going deep into meditation: pratyahara, dharana or dhyana, and expressing or transforming those samskaras in the form of visions. In the stages of pratyahara and dharana a lot of visions and feelings are experienced. This means one has not lost the individual ego. One is still at the level of duality. These experiences in meditation are only a transformed vision of one's samskara. One is expressing the samskara in that form. This can happen in the state of pratyahara, dharana, dhyana or in the early stages of samadhi. The deeper one goes, the greater is the fixing process of the samskara. These are the two important methods.

The third method is to voluntarily impose some sort of hardship upon oneself. By exposing oneself to any kind of

hardship, the whole mind gets a jolt and all kinds of things come out of it. The mind begins to express itself during the period one is imposing the hardship. These hardships are known as *tapasya*, penance. This is a negative process, so side by side positive samskaras should be added.

The fourth method which brings out karma is karma yoga. Karma means 'action'. In day-to-day life, the actions to which one is exposed are necessary for one's evolution. Therefore, seventy percent of one's life must be karma yoga. Serving the guru, serving the poor, working without any selfish motive are also important paths for the exhaustion of karma. This is karma yoga.

Asana, pranayama, ajapa japa, nada yoga and the other practices of yoga help to rid the mind of the accumulated samskaras, impressions and unconscious memories. No matter which yoga one practises, the toxic matter of life is going to come out: thousands of patterns of experiences, unworked karmas, suppressed emotions and everything else that is there, desirable and undesirable, necessary and unnecessary, horrible and wonderful. The chitta is a storehouse of cosmic knowledge; it is a treasure trove.

What are the different theories for exhausting samskaras?

Swami Satyananda: The problem of exhausting old samskaras has been discussed in all religions and philosophies by scholars, and various ways have been suggested. Some felt that the old samskaras could be exhausted more quickly by not creating any new karma, but people could not follow this method. Others felt that through selfless actions one could get rid of the karmas and exhaust the old samskaras. Ultimately, it was found that karma cannot be exhausted even by selfless and compassionate acts, as once the arrow has been released from the bow, it must reach its destination. One cannot destroy the karmas which are released from one's ancient stock; one must suffer or enjoy them.

Then the theory arose whereby one could transcend the karmas by realization of the self through methods such as

raja yoga or jnana yoga, and in this way the karmas would be destroyed. Logically and practically this was also found to be incorrect, as not everybody could become self-realized. If only one person out of millions could destroy their karmas and attain realization, it was not such a great method. For this reason the theory of self-realization was also refused and stands refuted even today.

Then came the theory of exhausting the karmas through a rigorous life of austerity, self-abnegation and self-mortification. From this idea many cults arose in both the East and the West. They thought that by suffering voluntarily, one might not have to suffer in the future. This seemed a logical deduction, but it was not true, as even those who had undergone tapasya still suffered afterwards.

Ultimately, the best method for the exhaustion of karma is the practice of yoga in accordance with the spirit of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Yoga practised with the background of complete understanding of the mind, senses and sense objects is the most effective method. Therefore, it is necessary to take up the yogic method in order to exhaust and destroy the old samskaras. In yoga there are also different methods for exhausting the impressions of the subconscious mind. The most effective means of harmonizing karma is through karma yoga.

What is the role of karma yoga and ashram life?

Swami Satyananda: Karma yoga means to act without any selfish motives. If a person can work with dedication and detachment, this is karma yoga, and it will purify the dross of karma. That is why in the olden days, householders used to visit ashrams, live there for some time and participate in the ashram activities. They never received any money, remuneration, certificates or diplomas. In the ashrams, kings and ordinary people lived equally and in a natural and harmonious way. Of course, the ashram lifestyle was completely different to that which existed at home. It was specifically designed so an aspirant could purge his karmas.

A process of purging takes place with karmas and the mind in the same way that one gets diarrhoea after stuffing oneself with too much rubbish food. This may cause a lot of suffering and inconvenience at first, but it is a form of purification. When the mind is overwhelmed by thoughts, emotions, passion and excitement, one must understand that one is purging on the psychological plane. At this time, it would be beneficial to expose oneself to ashram life, where the lifestyle offers the possibility of bringing about inner purification.

How do you train disciples for the attainment of quick spiritual success?

Swami Sivananda: As a drastic measure to overhaul the vicious worldly samskaras students are asked to drown themselves in active service for some months or years. The period of training varies according to the evolution of the students. They must know how to cook, wash and nurse the sick, and serve the sadhus and sannyasins in every possible way. Side by side, they must be able to learn yogic exercises, concentration, japa, meditation and so on. They must be able to write essays on philosophy and yoga, do kirtan and deliver lectures. I teach them all these points. I also give lessons in the treatment of some ordinary diseases. When the students are able to control their senses and advance in concentration and meditation, and have developed sattwic qualities, they are sent to cool places with instructions for deep meditation.

Why is it necessary to adopt an integrated approach to yoga?

Swami Satyananda: Meditation helps to wipe out past experiences or samskaras and to avoid the accumulation of new ones as well, but meditation by itself does not eliminate them entirely. Through meditation one cleans the body, mind and consciousness, but once again the karmas accumulate impressions. What is happening to the karmas?

On one side, one is clearing up the tensions and from the other side the tensions are coming in. On one side, one is trying to exhaust the samskaras, but from the other side the samskaras are being introduced, and again one is in the same state. For this reason, a yogi who practises meditation must also practise karma yoga and jnana yoga.

Through karma yoga one stops the samskaras; the effect of karma is going into the deepest core of the personality. There is an art to this which is described in the *Bhagavad Gita*. In the practice of jnana yoga one has to understand that “I am consciousness, the light is in me, I am not this body, I am not the senses.” This kind of understanding should be gained so that the mind does not become attached to things. One can nip the samskaras in the bud with correct thinking. The practice of *viveka*, right understanding, prevents impressions from registering in the mind as a result of attachment. Thus, no samskaras are gathered in the mind, and even if they are, their effect will not be lasting.

This is one technique of making the mind free from influences: nothing is to be done, thought of, believed or suggested. One only has to regard every influence as an aspect of the attitude of the mind and maintain detachment towards it. One may not be able to do this immediately, but it can be developed in time. In this way the emotional tensions, the tensions born of karma, or wrong thinking, should be stopped side by side with meditation.

How does karma yoga exhaust samskaras?

Swami Niranjanananda: While one is performing karma yoga with total one-pointed attention, the process of inner purification that one is trying to achieve brings deep-rooted samskaras to the surface of the consciousness in the form of likes and dislikes, ideas or concepts. When one sees things in a different light and becomes more perceptive and creative, it is also a form of samskara. Samskaras manifest when they become ripe, and influence and affect the behaviour and actions. The practice of karma yoga, however, helps one to

become aware of the samskaras that are ripening, and to remove their negative and disturbing influence from the mind, providing a state of purity, harmony, equilibrium and balance within. Karma yoga is a technique adopted for the elimination of samskaras and purification of the karmas.

How does the guru help the disciple to exhaust karma?

Swami Niranjanananda: The guru has his own methods of progressively whittling away the egotistical tendencies in his sannyasin disciple and helping the sannyasin to exhaust the karmas and samskaras which bind him.

In the later stages the guru may ask the sannyasin to go into solitude to work out his karmas through sadhana and austerity. In the early stages, however, the guru guides the sannyasin to exhaust the karmas through the medium of work or karma yoga. In jignasu and karma sannyasa, karma yoga takes the form of social service and upliftment. In vairagya sannyasa, it takes the form of organizational work and teaching within the mission as well as outside.

For the exhaustion of the sannyasin's karma, the guru plays his game called 'guru maya'. He knows the personality of the sannyasin thoroughly and puts him through various types of activities to enable him to shed some of his karma. The guru may assign any karma yoga, perhaps in the kitchen, garden, press or cleaning the ashram. Each form of karma yoga demands a specific type of awareness and can be used as a means to carry out introspection of the mind. The guru may also instruct him to keep *mouna* or silence while performing these tasks. This is an effective way to bring deep-rooted samskaras to the surface. Thus, the guru understands the natural vocation of the sannyasin, which will open the way for the exhaustion of karma. It may be that the sannyasin can best express his latent tendencies as a teacher of yoga philosophy and practice, a *yogacharya*, or as a writer, researcher, accountant, gardener, managing director or secretary. In this manner, as the sannyasin serves the guru, the karmas start flowing out without new karmas flowing in.

By using work to express the latent samskaras, the sannyasin is able to make a balanced transition from worldly life to spiritual life, and in this way a base for higher sadhana is prepared. Through guru seva, the sannyasin feels more at peace and begins to experience mental vairagya, or detachment, as the karmas are slowly rooted out. As the mind becomes more concentrated and still, the sannyasin is able to meditate more deeply and for longer periods of time. His mind begins to function like a clean mirror, reflecting the teachings and knowledge of the guru and his own inner being.

How can karmas be expressed in daily life without creating more karmas?

Swami Satyananda: Whatever behaviour a person expresses is an expression of himself and the sooner it comes out, the better it is for him. While expressing it, one must remember that it has to be controlled. It must come out in a controlled manner, so that it does not create an explosive reaction in the mind. At times the expression of something reacts on the whole personality again, creating another samskara that will have to be exhausted. The explosion takes place and again the mind reacts, creating another karma; thus a chain is created. In order to finish it, one has to explode the karmas in a controlled manner, so that they are exhausted without having any reaction on the mind.

Are all samskaras inevitable, or can one avoid accumulating them?

Swami Satyananda: There are certain samskaras which one has to undergo. There is no choice as long as one has a human body. There are certain karmas which cannot be wiped out. Birth is one karma and death is another. These are the karmas of the body and incarnation which one undergoes.

There are other illusory types of samskaras, which are created due to the quality of the mind and emotions. Love and hatred, separation, death and destruction cause strong

samskaras. These are created by the quality of the mind; that is how one sees them. One does not look at those events in life in a different way. For example, I will be unhappy if somebody in my family dies, but not everybody will be unhappy. Why? This is how my mind is working, but the mind of another person is not working that way.

The agonies of life would become less if one could change the quality and perception of the mind, but this does not happen, so samskaras develop. Whenever a person undertakes any work and has an experience of it, even if he enjoys it without any understanding, it becomes a samskara. There are three basic causes for the generation of samskaras: desire, *kama*, anger, *krodha*, and greed, *lobha*. These three together are responsible for the accumulation of samskaras. If a person can live forsaking these three, the samskaras can be finished quickly. Sri Krishna said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (16:21):

*Trividham narakasyedam dvaaram naashanamaatmanah;
Kaamah krodhastathaa lobhastasmaadetattrayam tyajet.*

Triple is the gate of this hell, destructive of the self – lust, anger and greed, therefore, one should abandon these three.

How does one know one is overcoming one's samskaras?

Swami Niranjanananda: Yoga makes one humble, and wisdom makes one humble; these are the milestones. One has missed the path somewhere if one feels that one is arrogant and not humble. One who can become simple and innocent is in the process of overcoming the inherent karmas and mental impressions or samskaras.

5

Karma in the Bhagavad Gita

What is the importance of karma or action in achieving the aim of life?

Swami Sivananda: A person takes birth in this world with a definite purpose. One is not born for mere sensual enjoyment. The goal of life is the attainment of self-realization or God-consciousness. The various activities of life should ultimately lead to that ideal or goal, otherwise life is wasted. If one does not attempt to attain the goal of life, there is no difference between the life of a beast and that of a human. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (3:16):

*Evam pravartitam chakram naanuvartayateha yah;
Aghaayurindriyaaraamo mogham paartha sa jeevati.*

He who does not follow the wheel thus set revolving,
who is of sinful life, rejoicing in the senses, he lives in
vain, O Arjuna!

Some people feel they don't want to work. Why is it necessary to engage in action?

Swami Sivananda: The basic foundation of the world order is mutuality and healthy cooperation. No one should disturb the equilibrium or interfere with the working of the world. Sri Krishna goes as far as saying (3:20–24):

*Lokasangrahaamevaapi sampashyankartumarhasi.
Yadyadaacharati shreshthastattadevetaro janah;*

*Sa yatpramaanam kurute lokastadanuvartate.
Na me paarthaasti kartavyam trishu lokeshu kinchana;*

*Naanavaaptamavaaptavyam varta eva cha karmani.
Yadi hyaham na vartheyam jaatu karmanyatandritah;*

*Mama vartmaanuvartante manushyaah paartha sarvashah.
Utseedeyurime lokaa na kuryaam karma chedaham.*

Even with a view to the protection of the masses you should perform action. (20)

Whatever a great man does, other men also do; whatever he sets as the standard that the world follows. (21)

There is nothing in the three worlds, O Arjuna, that should be done by Me, nor is there anything unattained that should be attained; yet I engage Myself in action. (22)

For, should I not ever engage Myself in action, unwearied, men would in every way follow My path, O Arjuna. (23)

These worlds would perish if I did not perform action. (24)

An individual should not remain an idler. He should not act selfishly. He should not refuse to work. He must perform his allotted work. This whole world is a big factory of God. The main wheel revolves. Leather belts are attached to other wheels and machines. Each small part or machine does its own allotted work. Man is part of the cycle and must perform his assigned task like the other parts. If he fails in the discharge of his duties and leads a sensual life, he is a mere burden on earth. It is better if such a man gives up his physical body and creates a void which can be better filled with air.

Should one renounce karma in order to move forward?

Swami Niranjanananda: As long as one has a body, one has to undergo the karma of the body. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (3:5):

*Na hi kashchitkshanamapi jaatu tishthatyakarmakrit;
Kaaryate hyavashah karma sarvah prakritijaigunaih.*

Indeed no one can ever remain for even one moment without performing action, for everyone is made to act helplessly indeed by the qualities, the gunas, born of nature, prakriti.

Every day one needs to eat, drink and urinate, as that is the karma of the body. The karma of the mind is thought, ambition and expectation. One desires, makes a need of that desire and, when the need becomes strong, plans how to attain it. The karma of the emotions is to want to be liked, appreciated, loved, supported, needed and guided. These karmas have to be lived all the time; they cannot be avoided. It is wrong to say that one can be free of karmas by not being an active participant in life.

No one in the world is free from karma, whether a renunciate or a person living in society. Even if external security, cooked food, car, home and family were renounced, karma would still take place. The body in which one lives has not been renounced, so one still eats when hungry, drinks when thirsty and goes to the toilet when necessary. The mind has not been renounced. One still follows the desires, does what one wants and looks for pleasant experiences in life. So what has been renounced? The craving is still there, but in a different form. Nobody in this world is free of karma. Even if God were to come to this planet, He would be confined by the karmas of the body, mind and life.

The yogic tradition speaks of attainment in a simple way. The practitioner has to go from the ground floor to the first floor by climbing a series of steps. He has to place one foot on the first step before the other foot can be placed on the next step. This is the experience of yoga. Actually, one does not renounce anything; one only attains something. In the process of attainment, the limiting and negative tendencies, which are the dross of life, automatically fall away.

Is it possible to renounce action in order to eliminate karma and avoid its effects?

Swami Satyananda: People may try to give up their karmas, believing that stress, tension and pain spring from them, but it is not possible to do so. Karmas are imposed on everyone by certain laws of nature. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (3:27):

Prakriteh kriyamaanaani gunaih karmaani sarvashah.

All actions are fashioned in all cases by the qualities or gunas of nature only.

Prakriti compels one to act through the interaction or the intermediate agency of the three gunas: sattwa, rajas and tamas. Therefore, the law of karma cannot be renounced and one should not try. The *Bhagavad Gita* (18:60) gives clear instructions on this point:

*Svabhaavajena kaunteya nibaddhah svena karmanaa;
Kartum nechchhasi yanmohaatkarihyasyavasho'pi tat.*

O Arjuna, bound by your own karma, born of your own nature, that which from delusion you do not wish to do, even that you will do helplessly!

Even if one were to renounce the external karmas, such as walking, typing, going to the shop and working in the kitchen, the mental karmas would continue. Karmas do not belong only to the body; they belong to the realm of the mind and desires. Even if one were to completely abstain from action, one could not stop thinking. The monk who lives in a monastery without a family also does karma. Even a person with plenty of money who does not have to work still does karma. The external actions that one does in everyday life are not the significant karma. The desires entertained in the mind are the real karma. When a person desires, it is karma.

Karma is a movement that takes place within the body, mind or emotions. No one can remain for a single moment without action, whether it is physical, mental, emotional,

or on some other level of being that one does not observe. According to the *Bhagavad Gita* (3:6), there is not a moment in life when one can remain without action:

*Karmendriyaani samyamya ya aaste manasaa smaran;
Indriyaarthaanvimoodhaatmaa mithyaachaarah sa uchyate.*

He who, restraining the organs of action, sits thinking of the sense objects in his mind, he, of deluded understanding, is called a hypocrite.

A person must act as long as he remains alive. The nature of his mind and his desires will compel him to act. If his desires, passions and ambitions do not compel him to act, he will become lethargic and dull. Desire, passion and ambition stimulate karma, they are the fuels for karma.

The philosophy of karma should not be misunderstood. Even if one sits down the whole day and does no work, one is still creating karma. Without moving the body or involving the senses, karma is constantly being created in the realm of the psyche, within the deeper dimensions of the mind, but those dimensions are so mysterious that one does not understand them. There is not a moment in life when the path of inactivity or inaction can be followed. One may not move, talk or participate in family affairs, but one is still thinking. In addition to that, there are involuntary actions, such as digesting, assimilating and so on. No one can renounce action.

What type of action, physical or mental, can be abandoned? Sneezing, sleeping, writing, speaking and sitting are all actions or karmas. Even renunciation is action; the abandoning of action is also an action. What do people mean when they say they have renounced the world? Has anybody been able to abandon action until now? Nobody can do it, even if they want to. A person's desires will compel him to act. As long as a person has ambitions and desires, he will have to act. A porter, a sadhu, a leader, a householder, everybody has to perform karma or act.

There is no such thing as renunciation of karma, no philosophy as such. The *Bhagavad Gita* teaches the utmost necessity of karma, nobody can escape from karma. Karma cannot be eliminated by renouncing action or even by renouncing one's intentions. Sri Krishna says (3:4):

*Na karmanaamanaarambhaannaishkarmyam purusho'shnute;
Na cha sannyasanaadeva siddhim samadhigachchhati.*

Not by non-performance of actions does man reach actionlessness, nor by mere renunciation does he attain perfection.

The dialogue in the *Bhagavad Gita* between Sri Krishna and Arjuna took place on this particular point. Arjuna felt he should try to escape from the clutches of karma, from the emotional turmoil of involvement with everyday life. He thought the easiest solution would be to stop doing karma, to be detached from everything. With this in mind, he wanted to renounce, but Sri Krishna disagreed. What is important in life is one's relationship with karma; the entire action should be evaluated from that view. Yoga has nothing to do with giving up action. It is about transforming the purpose and the meaning of life.

Why is action necessary in life?

Swami Satyananda: In the *Bhagavad Gita*, when Arjuna refused to perform his role and act, Sri Krishna asked him, "If you will not act, what will you do?" Arjuna replied, "I will leave, go to a monastery and stop all actions. The monastery will feed me and I will read scriptures all day long. I will not have to tell lies, I will not have to fight and kill, I will not have passion or hatred for anyone, I will not worry about anyone. I will just need a little food and the whole day I will be in meditation." But Sri Krishna said, "No, that is not the way for you."

Very few people are able to live such a life. The majority cannot do it, as the mind is under the sway of the three gunas: sattwa, rajas and tamas. People who are sattwic by nature have

exhausted their karmas and fulfilled the purpose of nature, so they have no desires. They remain the same, even if they are exposed to wealth, beautiful men or women and all the luxuries of life. They are all right if they have everything, and all right if they don't. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (18:26):

*Muktasango'namvadee dhrityutsaahasamanvitah;
Siddhyasiddhyornirvikaarah kartaa saattvika uchyate.*

He is called sattwic, who is free from attachment, non-egoistic, endowed with firmness and enthusiasm, and unaffected by success or failure.

The performance of karma, however, is necessary, even for the sattwic person; if he were to give up karma, others would imitate him. Therefore, the sattwic person should set an example for ordinary people by doing karma. If he doesn't, the balance of nature will be disturbed, as nature has created desire and action, and without them people will not evolve. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (3:26):

*Na buddhibhedam janayedajnaanaam karmasanginaam;
Joshayetsarvakarmaani vidvaanyuktah samaacharan.*

Let nowise person unsettle the minds of ignorant people, who are attached to action. He should engage them in all actions, himself fulfilling actions with devotion.

Most people are under the sway of rajo guna. They are dynamic and aggressive; they want this, that, and everything. The rajasic person, who is active by nature, will go mad if he renounces or gives up karma. There is the tamasic person, who is lazy, lethargic, indolent and procrastinating. This person will not evolve unless he works. Sri Krishna tells Arjuna that it is safer for everybody to perform karma, whether one works through the body, mind, or intellect. He has conveyed this teaching in all the eighteen chapters of the *Bhagavad Gita* (3:8). His constant advice to Arjuna is to act decisively:

*Niyatam kuru karma tvam karma jyaayo hyakarmanah;
Shareerayaatraapi cha te na prasiddhyedakarmanah.*

Do thou perform thy bounden duty, for action is superior to inaction. Even the maintenance of the body would not be possible for thee by inaction.

While living in this world one must continuously perform karma. Sri Krishna explained to Arjuna his *swadharma*, the most appropriate duties for him to perform, and made him aware of what he should be doing. Similarly, each person must perform certain duties, and none can ever escape them. Nature compels everyone to do karma. Even those who renounce the world cannot avoid this natural compulsion. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (3:33):

*Sadrisham cheshtate svasyaah prakriterjnaanavaanapi.
Prakritim yaanti bhootaani nigrahaah kim karishyati.*

Even a wise man acts in accordance with his nature; all beings follow their nature; what can restraint do?

All the creatures of this world have some duties to perform. They have their *swadharma*, and the performance of *swadharma* is compliance with God's will. Just as the nature of wind is to blow, water to flow and fire to burn, likewise, every person has certain duties to perform. Nature has allotted specific duties to everybody. Sri Krishna tells Arjuna that renunciation of action is in no way appropriate. Even sages, mahatmas, sadhus and sannyasins cannot renounce action. According to the *Bhagavad Gita* (18:7) anybody who renounces action is a sinner:

*Niyatasya tu sannyasaah karmano nopapadyate;
Mohaattasya parityaagastaamasah parikeertitah.*

Verily, the renunciation of obligatory action is improper. The abandonment of the same from delusion is declared to be tamasic.

God himself takes birth to perform action: Sri Rama, Buddha, Christ and Sri Krishna performed karma. Sri Krishna incarnated to kill Kamsa, and Sri Rama took birth to kill Ravana. The incarnations of God have been born with the sole objective of performing some specific karma.

If karma binds one to material life, how does it help one evolve?

Swami Satyananda: In the pursuit of daily life, one's attitude towards karma becomes purely materialistic. Every time one thinks about spiritual life, one thinks of renouncing karma. This is not true, as karma can never be a cause of bondage. Nature has created karma as a scheme for human evolution, an aid towards knowing the behaviour and deeper stages of the mind and achieving spiritual awareness.

The experiences of karma have to be gone through and all the hatred, anger, violence, the dark and evil thoughts of the mind have to be experienced. One has to experience all the shades of karma before one can transcend them. One should marry, have children, work and earn money, as these are the processes for repairing one's karma. They are the processes for repairing one's passions, insecurities, greed and so on. The various stages that one undergoes in life are the way to work out one's karma, to do away with the karma. Work is the essence of life. Physical work will give a lot of mental strength. Work generates good ideas, plans and programs. Karma purifies the mind, and when the mind is purified, perceptions become sharp and one can visualize many things.

Why is karma necessary in spiritual life? Isn't meditation enough?

Swami Niranjanananda: All masters have involved themselves in karma after they have attained the highest realization. Buddha did not isolate himself from the world after attaining nirvana; he plunged into karma. Mahavir did not seek the isolation of a mountain top after attaining enlightenment;

he plunged headlong into karma. That has been the trend followed by every seer and saint in this age, whether Maharishi Dayananda, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda, Swami Sivananda or Swami Satyananda. These living examples have attained realization and again involved themselves in action.

This makes one think differently, as the common belief is that nothing needs to be done after realization; one is free to retire to the mountains and lead a solitary life. Many sadhakas have been unable to advance in spiritual life due to this misunderstanding. They isolate themselves by creating walls of silence around themselves, meditating for ten or twenty hours a day. But that has no purpose and is not effective, as the transformative experience of life lies in karma, not in meditation. Karma, not meditation, has been the central philosophy of spiritual life. If karma yoga is followed sincerely, the state of meditation can be achieved within one year.

The seeds of karma that bind the personality to this plane and restrict the growth of human nature by becoming samskaras, unconscious desires for happiness and contentment, cannot be eradicated by meditation. Meditation can provide mental, emotional and psychic strength, tranquillity and harmony. When the grass grows, it can be cut and made to look beautiful on the surface, but the weeds are still there underneath. Similarly, meditation gives relief when the mind is going through times of difficulty, conflict, tension, anxiety and stress. The surface of the mind becomes tranquil and peaceful, but the weeds of karma are deep and cannot be uprooted through meditation alone. For this reason, karma yoga is the central theme of yoga.

In the *Bhagavad Gita* (4:33), emphasis is given to acceptance, performance and realization of action. It also says that the knowledge of action in life and understanding the role that each human being has to play is a secret subject that has never been revealed before. Only through perfection in action can one improve the quality of life. It says:

Sarvam karmaakhilam paartha jnaane parisamaapyate.

All actions in their entirety, O Arjuna, culminate in knowledge.

When the word yoga is associated with karma, it takes on a different meaning altogether. It indicates a process by which one becomes the master of one's karma and not the subject of one's karma. When one is under the influence of karma, one is subject to karma, and when one becomes the master of karma, one is a karma yogi.

How does the Bhagavad Gita view the role of karma in evolution?

Swami Satyananda: From the viewpoint of philosophy, no other treatise has ever been written in which karma has been advocated with such clarity, courage, confidence and faith. Only one topic is discussed in the *Bhagavad Gita* from the first chapter to the end of the eighteenth chapter: how to perform karma, how to express oneself totally, how to use karma for the evolution of the mind and the improvement of one's situations in life, and how to make karma a tool of yoga. Religions and seers that have existed in the world have ultimately recommended that karma be given up and the world abandoned and loathed. The *Bhagavad Gita* (5:2) is the main spiritual text in which karma has been accepted as yoga:

*Sannyasaah karmayogashcha nihshreyasakaraavubhau;
Tayostu karmasannyasaatkarmayogo vishishyate.*

Renunciation and the yoga of action both lead to the highest bliss; but of the two, the yoga of action is superior to the renunciation of action.

While most seers accept karma as a means of sensory gratification, acquiring worldly goods and fulfilling one's desires, the *Bhagavad Gita* expounds that karma is a means to yoga, to becoming self-realized. It accepts karma as

a necessary link in the experience of the supreme soul. Without karma, the *jivatma*, the individual soul, can never improve. Only the *Bhagavad Gita* has made this statement with firm faith. Karma should not be abandoned, karma is not wrong. This philosophy of karma should be understood by everyone in their lives. Karma is the basis of life and therefore everybody has to do it, so one should do it in the spirit of karma yoga.



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BHAGAVAD GITA

1. Karma: An Overview

- (2:49) . . . wretched are they whose motive is the fruit of action. 24
- (4:41) Arjuna, actions do not bind him who has renounced actions according to the spirit of karma yoga, whose doubts are rent asunder by knowledge and who is self-possessed. 31

2. Laws of Karma

- (4:17) Hard to understand is the path of action. 35
- (13:20) In the production of cause and effect, nature is said to be the cause; in the experience of pleasure and pain, the soul is said to be the cause. 55
- (5:15) The Lord accepts neither the demerit nor even the merit of any; knowledge is enveloped by ignorance, thereby beings are deluded. 55

3. Karma Classified

- (5:11) Yogis, having abandoned attachment, perform actions only by the body, mind, intellect and also by the senses, for purification of the self. 67
- (2:48) Perform action, O Arjuna, being steadfast in yoga, abandoning attachment and balanced in success and failure! Evenness of mind is called yoga. 67
- (3:8) . . . and even the maintenance of the body would not be possible for you by inaction. 71
- (3:9) The world is bound by actions other than those performed for the sake of sacrifice. Therefore, O son of Kunti, do thou perform action for the sake of sacrifice alone, free from attachment! 76
- (18:25) Action undertaken from delusion, without regard to the consequences of loss, injury and (one's own) ability, is declared to be tamasic. 94
- (18:24) Action done with longing for gain or for the fulfilment of desires, with egoism, or with much effort, is declared to be rajasic. 94

- (18:23) An action which is ordained, which is free from attachment, which is done without love or hatred, by one who is not desirous of any reward, is declared to be sattwic. 94
- (14:10) Now sattwa arises, O Arjuna, having overpowered rajas and tamas; now rajas, having overpowered sattwa and tamas; and now tamas, having overpowered sattwa and rajas! 96
- (14:23) He who is seated like one unconcerned, who is unmoved by the gunas, yet knows that the gunas are active, who is centred in the Self and moves not, 96
- (14:24) Who is the same in pleasure and pain, who dwells in the Self, to whom a clod of earth, stone and gold are alike, who is the same to the dear and the unfriendly, who is firm, and to whom censure and praise are as one, 96
- (14:25) Who is the same in honour and dishonour; the same to friend and foe, abandoning all undertakings, he is said to have crossed the gunas. 97
- (14:19) Having crossed beyond the three gunas from which the body is evolved, the embodied one is freed from birth, death, decay and pain, and attains immortality. 97
- (14:20) When the seer beholds no agent other than the gunas, knowing that which is higher than them, he attains to My Being. 97
- (17:26) The word Sat is used in the sense of reality and of goodness; and so also, O Arjuna, it is used in the sense of an auspicious act! 97

4. Samskara

- (16:21) Triple is the gate of this hell, destructive of the self – lust, anger and greed, therefore, one should abandon these three. 132

5. Karma in the Bhagavad Gita

- (3:16) He who does not follow the wheel thus set revolving, who is of sinful life, rejoicing in the senses, he lives in vain, O Arjuna! 133
- (3:20) Even with a view to the protection of the masses you should perform action. 134

- (3:21) Whatever a great man does, that other men also do; whatever he sets up as the standard, that the world follows. 134
- (3:22) There is nothing in the three worlds, O Arjuna, that should be done by Me, nor is there anything unattained that should be attained; yet I engage Myself in action. 134
- (3:23) For, should I not ever engage Myself in action, unwearied, men would in every way follow My path, O Arjuna. 134
- (3:24) These worlds would perish if I did not perform action. . . 134
- (3:5) Indeed no one can ever remain for even a moment without performing action, for everyone is made to act helplessly indeed by the qualities, the gunas, born of nature, prakriti. 135
- (3:27) All actions are fashioned in all cases by the qualities or gunas of nature only. 136
- (18:60) O Arjuna, bound by your own karma, born of your own nature, that which from delusion you do not wish to do, even that you will do helplessly! 136
- (3:6) He who, restraining the organs of action, sits thinking of the sense-objects in mind, he, of deluded understanding, is called a hypocrite. 137
- (3:4) Not by the non-performance of actions does man reach actionlessness, nor by mere renunciation does he attain perfection. 138
- (18:26) He is called sattwic, who is free from attachment, non-egoistic, endowed with firmness and enthusiasm, and unaffected by success or failure. 139
- (3:26) Let no wise person unsettle the minds of the ignorant people, who are attached to action. He should engage them in all actions, himself fulfilling actions with devotion. 139
- (3:28) Do thou perform thy bounden duty, for action is superior to inaction. Even the maintenance of the body would not be possible for thee by inaction. 140
- (3:33) Even a wise man acts in accordance with his nature; All beings follow their nature; what can restraint do? 140

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HOLY BIBLE

2. Laws of Karma

New Testament (2 Corinthians 9:6) He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.	45
New Testament (Luke 6:31) Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you.	45

RAMACHARITAMANAS OF TULSIDAS

3. Karma Classified

(Balakanda, doha 6) The creator created both good and bad, But the Vedas separated the objects of creation according to their qualities. Thus originated affluence and adversity, vice and virtue, day and night, saint and villain, good and bad. The creator made beings animate and inanimate, of all qualities, both good and bad. Saints, like the swan, have the capacity to extract the good from the bad. From a mixture of milk and water, the swan takes out the milk and leaves the water. Similarly, the saints are able to take the good and leave out the bad from a mixture of both.	83
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RAMAYANA OF SAGE VALMIKI

2. Laws of Karma

(Aranyakanda 29:8) The perpetrator of a sinful deed inevitably reaps its terrible consequences when the time comes, just as a tree puts forth its blossom in the proper season.	43
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SHIVA PURANA

2. Laws of Karma

Karma once done is never lost in a crore of *kalpas*, aeons.
One must enjoy or suffer the fruit of every deed. 50

YOGA SUTRAS OF SAGE PATANJALI

1. Karma: An Overview

(2:14) Birth and class, the span of life and experience have happiness or sorrow as their fruits, depending upon merit or demerit. 26

3. Karma Classified

(4:7) The actions of yogis are neither white nor black; of others they are threefold. 79

4. Samskara

(1:18) Asmaprajnata is preceeded by a continued study of stopping the content of mind. In it the mind remains in the form of traces. 107

YOGA VASISHTHA OF SAGE VASISHTHA

3. Karma Classified

(2:10:1) This thing called destiny is as true as the reality of God. It is the cause of causes and effect of effects. It is an attribute of God. 63

Glossary

Adikarma – the first action.

Agami – coming in the future; next.

Agami karma – karma being performed now, which will fructify in the future; also called kriyamana karma. See Kriyamana karma.

Ahamkara – faculty of ego, awareness of the existence of 'I'. See Antahkarana.

Ahara – third instinct; craving satisfaction, food or nourishment.

Ajna chakra – psychic/pranic centre situated at the medulla oblongata at the top of the spinal column in the mid-brain; seat of intuition, higher knowledge; third eye.

Akarma – a state where one is not attached and not the doer of actions being performed, and thus no samskaras are produced.

Akarta – non-doer.

Aksharasya prashaasane – in the governance of the imperishable.

Anadi kala – eternity, beginningless time.

Anadi vasana – beginningless desires; the impressions and experiences of many lives.

Aniccha prarabdha – unwanted prarabdha.

Antahkarana – literally, 'inner tool', inner organ of consciousness, consisting of: ahamkara, manas, buddhi and chitta.

Arhant – God.

Asamprajnata – stage of samadhi.

Ashubha, ashubham – evil, inauspicious.

Ati-prashna – transcendental question.

Atma, atman – the self beyond mind and body; principle of life; highest reality, Supreme Consciousness, spirit, soul.

Atmajnana – direct knowledge of the self.

Aum – the universal cosmic mantra representing the four states of consciousness; the sound indicating the supreme sublime reality or Brahman; conveys concepts of omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence.

Avidya – ignorance of reality. See Klesha.

Bhagavad Gita – literally, ‘divine song’; Sri Krishna’s discourse to his disciple Arjuna delivered on the battlefield of Kurukshetra at the commencement of the great Mahabharata war; one of the source books of Hindu philosophy, containing the essence of the Upanishads and yoga.

Bhakti yoga – branch of yoga in which emotional energy is channelled towards a divine relationship; a systematic path with nine stages which expand, strengthen, and purify the emotions.

Bhaya – second instinct; fear; fear of death, fear of losing one’s identity and associations.

Bhikku, Bhikshu – mendicant monk; beggar.

Bhoga swatantrata – the freedom to enjoy or suffer.

Bhogi – a person with gross mentality and materialistic tendencies; sensualist; an individual involved in karma for their personal satisfaction and not for inner purification.

Bija – seed; seed state; source, origin.

Brahma – god of the Hindu trinity who creates the universe; God as creator; manifest force of life and creation.

Brahmacharya – one who is absorbed in higher consciousness; sensual restraint; celibacy; conduct suitable for proceeding to the highest state of existence; one of the yamas described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras* as resulting in indomitable courage.

Brahmajnana – experience and knowledge of Brahman, pure Consciousness or the Absolute; divine knowledge.

Brahman – etymologically ‘ever expanding, limitless consciousness’; name of Supreme Consciousness or cosmic intelligence according to Vedanta philosophy; God as creator; monistic concept of Absolute Reality.

Brahmananda prakriti – the nature of blissful, Absolute Consciousness.

Buddha – the enlightened one; generally referring to the founder of Buddhism.

Buddhi – discerning, discriminating aspect of mind; aspect of mind closest to pure consciousness; one of the four parts of the antahkarana, or inner instrument. See Antahkarana.

Chandi – a manifestation of Durga, Chandi is invincible in battle against demonic forces.

Chidakasha – the space of consciousness; the inner space visualized in meditation behind the closed eyes or in the region of ajna chakra.

Chitta – individual consciousness, including the subconscious and the unconscious layers of mind; thinking, concentration, attention, enquiry; storehouse of memory or samskaras; one of the four parts of the antahkarana, or inner instrument. See Antahkarana.

Chitta shuddhi – purification of the mind; purity of consciousness.

Daiva karma – to cultivate awareness of the transcendental nature, divinity or purity in life; to create a state of tranquillity, peace, harmony and luminosity.

Devata – form of divine dignity or power; divine being representing the higher states of evolution.

Devi – female deity, goddess.

Dharana – practice of concentration or complete attention; sixth stage of ashtanga yoga described in Sage Patanjali’s *Yoga Sūtras* as holding or binding the mind to one point.

Dhyana – spontaneous state of meditation; one-pointedness of mind through concentration on either a form, thought

or sound; absorption in the object of meditation; seventh stage of Sage Patanjali's ashtanga yoga.

Dushkarma – bad deeds via which one attains lower births: animals, birds or trees.

Dvandva – pairs of opposites like pain and pleasure; duality.

Gargi – female sage whose questions and debates are recorded in *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*.

Grihastha ashrama – the second stage of life according to the ancient vedic ashrama tradition, i.e. household or married life from 25 to 50 years of age.

Guna – quality; the three gunas, qualities or aspects of prakriti are sattwa, rajas and tamas.

Gunatita – beyond the three gunas; beyond the mind, senses and play of nature.

Guru – one who dispels the darkness caused by ignorance (avidya); teacher of the science of ultimate reality who by the light of his own atma can dispel darkness, ignorance and illusion from the mind and enlighten the consciousness of a devotee/disciple; preceptor.

Guru maya – For the exhaustion of a sannyasin's karma, the guru plays his game called 'guru maya'.

Guru seva – service to the guru.

Himsa – anything which disrupts the natural flow of human perception and consciousness; violence, killing, harm, injury.

Ichha – wish, desire, will.

Ichha prarabdha – creates desire; one knows the negative consequences of certain actions, yet is impelled to do them.

Jignasu sannyasa – stage of aspirant, spiritual seeker; preliminary stage of sannyasa.

Jiva – principle of life; individual or personal soul; living being.

Jivanmukta – liberated in life; an enlightened person, a person purified by true knowledge of the Supreme Reality and freed from future births while still embodied.

Jivanmukti – final liberation in the present state of life.

Jivatma, jivatman – individual or personal soul.

Jnana, jnanam – knowledge, cognition, wisdom; higher knowledge derived from meditation or from inner experience.

Jnana yoga – yoga of knowledge and wisdom attained through spontaneous self-analysis and investigation of abstract and speculative ideas; leading a discriminative lifestyle, living with wisdom.

Jnani – one who expresses wisdom in daily life.

Kaivalya – final liberation; highest state of samadhi; that state of consciousness which is beyond duality.

Kalpa – aeon, era; one day in the life of Brahma (4,320,000,000 human years); rules and regulations of religious work; seed.

Kama – emotional, sensual love; lust.

Kamsa – a tyrannical king killed by Sri Krishna who incarnated for this purpose.

Kamya karma – karma done with desire.

Karana sharira – causal body; also called anandamaya kosha.

Karma – action and result; law of cause and effect.

Karma sannyasa – literally, ‘renunciation of karma’; householder sannyasa, renunciation combined with duty.

Karma swatantrata – freedom of action.

Karma yoga – yogic path of action; union with the Supreme Consciousness through action; action without attachment to the fruits of action.

Karmaphala – the fruit, result or consequence of any deed.

Karmashaya – deep layers of consciousness where the karmas are stored in the form of impressions, symbols or archetypes; repository of karma; aggregate of work done.

Karmic – pertaining to karma.

Karta – doer; one who performs actions with the inner attitude that ‘I am doing’.

Kayika – relating to the body; bodily.

Krishna – literally, ‘black’ or ‘dark’; eighth incarnation of Vishnu; avatara who descended in the dwapara yuga. Sri Krishna is perhaps the most celebrated hero in Hindu mythology and seems to be a historical figure. To uphold dharma he orchestrated the Mahabharata war. His teachings to his friend and disciple Arjuna during that war are immortalized in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Kriyamana karma – karma being performed now; the effects of the deeds of the present life which are to be experienced in the future; literally, ‘which is being done’; also called agami karma. See Agami karma.

Krodha – anger, aggression.

Kukarma – bad deeds via which one attains lower births: animals, birds or trees.

Lobha – greed; desire.

Mahabharata – epic of ancient India said to be composed by Sage Veda Vyasa, involving the history and consequences of the great battle between the Kaurava and Pandava princes. It consists of eighteen sections and the *Bhagavad Gita* is a part of it.

Mahatma – literally, ‘great soul’; used with reference to a person who has destroyed the ego and realized the self as one with all.

Maithuna – physical union; the first basic instinct; copulation; fusion of male and female energies.

Manas – finite mind, rational mind; the mind concerned with senses, thought and counter-thought; perception, intelligence. See Antahkarana.

Manomaya kosha – mental sheath or body; mental sphere of life and awareness.

Mara – Satan.

Maya – means by which Brahman creates the phenomenal world; power of creation; illusive power; in Vedanta philosophy, the two powers of maya are: 1. the power of veiling, and 2. the power of projection; in Samkhya philosophy, another name for Prakriti.

Mimamsa – deep reflection, analysis, school of Indian philosophy.

Mishrita, mishrita karma – mixed deeds, mixed karma; one attains human birth via this karma.

Moha – delusion; infatuation.

Mouna – silence; measured speech.

Mukti – release, liberation, final absolution of the consciousness from the chain of birth and death and from the illusion of maya.

Naimittika karma – actions done for some purpose.

Nidra – fourth instinct; deep sleep; isolation from the mind and senses; disassociation.

Nirmanā chitta – the higher mind where there is no enjoyment of pleasure and pain; consciousness beyond the mind.

Nishiddha karma – prohibited action.

Nishkama karma – action done without desire; action without expectation of fruits and done without personal interest or egoism. This type of action purifies the mind and heart without creating new bondage.

Nityakarma – necessary, routine daily actions; a constant act of duty; eternal actions.

Nyayikas – logicians.

Paradharma – duties prescribed for another.

Paraiccha prarabdha – undergoing the effect of another person's desire, feeling or thought; a desire other than one's own.

Parameshwara – Supreme Being.

Parampurusha – Supreme Consciousness.

Paravidya – transcendental knowledge.

Paropkara – social karma, working for the benefit of others in society.

Pashu bhava – instinctive personality.

Patanjali, Sage – author of the *Yoga Sutras*; an ancient rishi who codified the system of raja yoga including ashtanga yoga.

Poorva Mimamsa – one of the six systems of Indian philosophy based on the Vedas, often simply called Mimamsa or

Karma Mimamsa. It deals mainly with the ritual portions of the Vedas, the karmas or actions necessary during ceremonies.

Prakriti – nature; manifested shakti; manifest and unmanifest nature composed of the three gunas; counterpart of purusha in Samkhya philosophy.

Prarabdha karma – actions already performed which, like arrows shot from the bow, cannot be retrieved; previous karmas which have matured enough to give fruit; that portion of one's actions which is bound to fructify in the present life and cannot be averted. See Iccha Prarabdha, Aniccha Prarabdha, Paraiccha Prarabdha.

Pratyahara – restraining the sensory and motor organs; withdrawal and emancipation of the mind from the domination of the senses and sensual objects; training the senses to follow the mind within; fifth stage of ashtanga yoga described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*.

Prayaschitta karma – atonement for one's acts of unawareness during all births.

Puranas – eighteen ancient texts containing the earliest mythology of the tantric and vedic traditions, consisting of legends and mythological narrations dealing with creation, recreation and the genealogies of sages and rulers.

Purusha – literally, 'the one who lives in the city (of the body)'; the soul; pure consciousness according to Samkhya philosophy, undefiled and unlimited by contact with prakriti or matter; can also refer to a man or human being.

Purushartha – human attainment; the four basic needs or desires to be fulfilled in life, viz. artha (wealth), kama (love), dharma (duty), moksha (liberation).

Raja yoga – the supreme yoga; union through control of the mental processes and concentration of mind; the most authoritative text is Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* which contain ashtanga yoga, the eightfold path.

Rajas – one of the three gunas or attributes; dynamism; state of activity; creativity combined with full ego involvement. See Guna.

Rajasic – pertaining to rajas.

Rajoguna – quality of rajas.

Rakshasa – demon, evil spirit.

Rama – the seventh avatara of Vishnu and embodiment of dharma, hero of the epic Ramayana; a heroic and virtuous king.

Ramayana – one of the most famous ancient Indian epics, relating the life of Sri Rama, the most widely known version was composed by Sage Valmiki, containing about 24,000 verses in seven chapters.

Ravana – the ten-headed demon king who kidnapped Sita, Sri Rama's wife, and was slain by Sri Rama; his ten heads symbolize attachment to phenomenal reality.

Sadhaka – one who practises sadhana; a spiritual aspirant

Sadhana – spiritual practice or discipline performed regularly.

Sadhu – good or holy person, sage, saint.

Sakama karma – action motivated by selfish desire.

Sakama – with desire.

Sakshi – that which observes the phenomenal reality without being affected at all; witness.

Samadhi – the culmination of meditation, state of oneness of mind with the object of concentration and the universal consciousness; self-realization; the eighth stage of raja yoga.

Samajik – social.

Samkhya – one of the six systems of Indian philosophy. Attributed to Sage Kapila, Samkhya is a spiritual science based on the division of all existence into the two eternal principles of purusha and prakriti, and the twenty-three elements of creation; the philosophical basis of the yoga system.

Samsara – illusory world; the course or circuit of worldly life; unending cycle of birth and death.

Samskara – mental impression stored in the subtle body as an archetype; the impressions which condition one's nature, causing one to react or respond in a certain way.

Sanchita karma – stored karma; accumulated experiences and involvement in life which have been registered by the consciousness and although not influencing one's life at the moment, will manifest in the future.

Sankalpa – positive resolve; purpose, aim, intention; willpower.

Sannyasa – dedication; complete renunciation of the world, its possessions and attachments; abandonment of the phenomenal world.

Sannyasin – one who has taken sannyasa initiation, surrendering everything to the guru and the spiritual journey.

Sanyam – restraint, self-discipline; harmonious control of concentration (dharana), meditation (dhyana) and samadhi fused into one process.

Satchidananda – literally, 'truth-consciousness-bliss'; the nature of Supreme Consciousness.

Satkarma – pure desire (of a liberated sage); desire for moksha.

Sattwa – one of the three gunas, or attributes of nature; state of luminosity, harmony, equilibrium and purity. See Guna.

Sattwic – pertaining to sattwa.

Shiva – state of pure consciousness, individual and cosmic, original source of yoga; Lord of yogis; auspicious, benevolent one; name of the god of the Hindu trinity who is entrusted with the work of destruction; destroyer of the ego and duality.

Shiva Purana – collection of six ancient scriptures that tell the story of Shiva. See Purana

Shraddha – trust, faith, belief; religious faith; sedateness, composure of mind.

Shubham – auspiciousness, goodness.

Sthoola sharira – gross, physical body; annamaya kosha.

Sukshma sharira – subtle body composed of pranamaya, manomaya and vijnanamaya koshas; part of the sub-conscious which manifests in the dream state.

Swabhava – one's own essential nature.

Swadharma – one’s own duty in life; the most appropriate duties for each person to perform.

Swadhyaya – self-observation, self-study, continuous conscious awareness of what one is doing; study of the scriptures.

Swarga – heaven, Lord Indra’s paradise.

Swaroopa – one’s own form or shape; natural state or condition; essential nature; true constitution.

Tamas – one of the three gunas or attributes of nature; inertia, stability; ignorance, darkness; unwillingness to change.
See Guna

Tamasic – pertaining to tamas.

Tamoguna – quality of tamas.

Tapasya – practice of austerity.

Upanishads – the philosophical portion of the Vedas, traditionally one hundred and eight in number, containing intimate dialogues and discussions between guru and disciple on the nature of the Absolute and the path leading towards it; literally, ‘to sit near and listen’ (to the spiritual teacher); regarded as the source of Vedanta, Yoga and Samkhya philosophies.

Uttara Mimamsa – one of the six principle systems of Indian philosophy, usually called Vedanta; deals mainly with Brahman, the Supreme Reality.

Vacha – word; speech; interaction in the manifest world with family, friends, society and nation, in which one expresses one’s feelings, thoughts and behaviour.

Vachika – vocal; verbal.

Vairagya – non-attachment; absence of sensual craving and desires; detachment; supreme dispassion.

Vairagya sannyasa – state of sannyasa based on deep vairagya; another name for poorna sannyasa (full sannyasa).

Vasana – subtle impressions which are the seeds of desires.

Vasishtha, Sage – a celebrated rishi and seer of the Vedas; author of many vedic hymns. His teachings are recorded in *Yoga Vasishtha*, one of the greatest expositions of jnana yoga.

Vedanta – one of the six principle systems of Indian philosophy; literally, ‘the last part of the Vedas’; the school

of Hindu thought based primarily on the Upanishads; the doctrine of non-dualism (Advaita).

Vedas – ancient texts revealed to the sages and saints of India, explaining and regulating every aspect of life from Supreme Reality to worldly affairs; four in number: Rig, Yajur, Sama, Atharva, which are further divided into the Samhita, Brahmana, Aranyaka and Upanishads; the oldest books in the library of mankind, parts of them revealed to sages and seers before 5000 BC.

Veera bhava – heroic and dynamic nature.

Vichara shakti – willpower; power of thought.

Vikarma – bad deeds via which one attains lower births: animals, birds or tree.

Vishnu – vedic deity; the second deity of the Hindu trinity (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva), entrusted with the preservation of the universe, a duty which obliges him to appear in several incarnations; Supreme Consciousness.

Viveka – discrimination; right knowledge or understanding; sense of discrimination between the self and what is not the self, between the eternal and the transitory, between consciousness and unconsciousness, between prakriti and purusha.

Vivekin – a person with discrimination.

Vritti – a modification arising in the mind related to a thought pattern; a particular state or condition.

Yoga – union; the root is yuj, meaning ‘to join’, ‘to yoke’; a system of practice leading to a state of union between the individual and universal awareness; practices, philosophy and lifestyle to achieve peace, power and spiritual wisdom as well as perfect health, a sound mind and a balanced personality; one of the six main systems of Indian philosophy.

Yoga agni – yogic fire.

Yoga Shastras – the yoga system of philosophy and practice where the chief aim is to teach the means for the human soul to unite completely with the supreme spirit; elaborate rules for the proper practice of concentration of mind.

Yoga Sutras – ancient authoritative text on raja yoga by Sage Patanjali.

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Notes

Notes



Conversations on the Science of Yoga is an encyclopaedic series presenting the vast, timeless culture of yoga topic by topic through the voice of three generations of masters – Swami Sivananda Saraswati, Swami Satyananda Saraswati and Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati. The teachings are given in question and answer format with the inclusion of verses from the scriptures, connecting the modern experience with the classical tradition.

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